you are all i have ever wanted

notsosureabthis

Yellowjackets (TV) Complete

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Summary

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Description:

No plane crash, no pregnancy. Slow burn JackieShauna from Shauna's POV with a lot of fighting and a lot of pining. Shauna's fucking confused and impulsive and self destructive, but we love her anyway! They're in love idc. Same storyline as is this really what you wanted but from Shauna's POV.

Chapter 1

It was Mari's 18th birthday, and Shauna was refusing to go to her party. Jackie had been bitching her out for it all day. They had been bickering for weeks now, neither of them able to figure out why.

"Would you just fucking stop it? She's our friend, and she invited us. We're going." Jackie said it like Shauna had no sense of fucking free will.

"She is not my friend." Shauna turned around and started folding her laundry, trying not to get too mean. She really was trying to bite her tongue, but Jackie just treated her like a fucking child. It was getting old. "Mari is *your* friend."

"Well, she's your teammate." Shauna rolled her eyes, choosing not to look up at her. "I don't even understand why you don't like her." Shauna looked up now. Oh, I don't know. Maybe because every time Shauna was a little too lame or a little too angry and bitter Jackie suddenly became best friends with her.

"She's a fucking bitch, Jackie." Jackie smiled at her, like she was fucking stupid.

"We're 18 year old girls, Shipman. We're all bitches." Shauna threw the laundry down.

"She's rude, Jackie. She is mean to everybody she talks to for no fucking reason. The only reason you like her is because she's too low on the social ladder for anything to affect you." Jackie's brow furrowed and part of Shauna wanted her to snap back. She wanted her to be mean, wanted to justify her own hatred for the girl, but Jackie bit her tongue.

"If you think so low of me, then fine. You can sulk in the corner all night if that would make you feel better, but we are not going to lose any state playoff games because you couldn't figure out how to play nice for a night. She's your teammate, I'm the team captain, and it would look like shit if my best friend was the only Yellowjacket not there." Shauna rolled her eyes and Jackie opened up a magazine, pretending to read it. Shauna knew she was just trying to make it seem like she was indifferent, but she wasn't. Shauna was now apparently a threat to her social standing, so she had to have been rattled. Jackie was trying not to make it obvious that she was watching Shauna huff and puff and throw her socks across the room at her dresser and Shauna gave in.

"Fine. I'm going. You can relax." Jackie threw the magazine down and smiled at her a little too genuinely for the way they were just fighting. It was enough to make her feel a little guilty, but she hadn't said anything that wasn't true. Jackie was able to be nice to the girl because she wasn't a threat to her. Nothing Mari said seemed to ever get to her, which was a privileged position to have. The shots she took at Nat and Misty every possible chance she got had always rubbed Shauna the wrong way. That being said, Jackie wasn't ever one to shy away from slut shaming Nat either. Maybe that had something to do with Shauna's constant anger. Jackie started to dig into Shauna's underwear drawer.

"I'm gonna find you the best bikini to wear, Shipman. It'll be great. You're gonna love it." Shauna rolled her eyes and sat on her bed, knowing she had no choice but to let Jackie

control her every outfit choice, every opinion, every thought. Once again, it was very clear that the girl who was once her best friend was more concerned now with maintaining her image and making sure Shauna didn't get in her way. Jackie held up a black bikini top that was probably a year or so too old and a size too small and bottoms that Jackie had convinced her to buy but she had never worn.

"Jackie my whole ass is going to be out. I'm not wearing those." It was practically a thong. There was nothing to it.

"What did you buy them for then?" *Because you told me I'd look good in them and I can't ever grow a backbone and tell you no.* Shauna reached out and grabbed the swim suit out of Jackie's hands.

"I'll wear it, but only because I'm not getting in the pool."

"Oh! Hold on." Jackie was so excited, and so oblivious to how it was upsetting Shauna. She ran around her to Shauna's closet and opened the doors. She rummaged through it and pulled out a pair of white linen pants. "These will be perfect."

"They're see through, Jax."

"And you'll look hot in them. Trust me." She handed the pants over and waved Shauna off, like it didn't make a difference what she had to say. "Go get dressed, Jeff is gonna be here any minute." Shauna turned and walked to the bathroom without saying a word. She splashed some water on her face and changed, grabbing her razor to shave her legs quick in the sink. Couldn't have princess Jackie's best friend showing up with hairy legs. She looked at herself in the mirror and saw her body looking like it was spilling out of her swimsuit. Her legs looked too bulky compared to the little bikini bottoms, and she felt like her arms were bigger than her tits. She sighed, knowing that going back and changing would only make Jackie upset. She pulled the white linen pants over her legs, which helped a little bit. Shauna was about to walk back to her bedroom before deciding to add a little bit of eye makeup to help her feel a little better. It always helped her feel more comfortable, and Jackie hated it, so that helped too. She smiled at the thought of it and walked back out. Jackie was already changed, dressed in a baby blue bikini. Shauna's eyes hung on her toned abs and the way her whole body was perfectly positioned inside her suit. She felt her face get hot and it made her realize she hated her even more. Jackie was always going to be perfect. She was always going to look hotter, be more put together and confident. And why shouldn't she be? She was fucking gorgeous.

"Damn, Shipman! We're gonna find you a man tonight, I'm telling you."

Shauna rolled her eyes, "I do not understand this need of yours to set me up."

"You're hot. Young, hot girls deserve boyfriends. That's just how it works." Jackie smiled at her.

Shauna laughed, "Oh, really?"

"Yep. I don't make the rules." Shauna shook her head as Jackie pulled a pair of jean shorts over her suit. Jeff honked his horn in the driveway, and Shauna pulled her eyes away, trailing Jackie out of the door like a lost puppy.

She sat in the backseat while Jeff tried to make casual conversation with her. She was not entertained. Shauna couldn't understand why he still tried talking to her. All Shauna ever did was ignore him. Jackie looked up at her, tapping on her knee to get her attention. "Hey, it's gonna be fun. You'll be glad you came, I know it." Shauna smiled a little and nodded her head, but Jackie didn't seem convinced. "We'll be right there the whole time, okay? We can hang out, just the three of us." Like that was supposed to be some kind of party. Third wheeling with Jackie and Jeff actually seemed like something out of her nightmares. Shauna couldn't stop herself from rolling her eyes. Jackie gave her a tight lipped smile and Shauna knew she was pissed. She probably had good reason to be. They got to Mari's and Jackie ran up to her to give her a big hug, acting all sweet. Shauna faked a smile and kept her distance, which Mari didn't seem very upset about anyway. Jackie rolled her eyes and started some conversation about Mari's ex. Shauna beelined for the drinks. She looked up and Jeff was right there with her.

"Do you seriously still hate me? After four years?" Jeff said it like it was ridiculous. Yes, she still hated him. He and Jackie were on and off all of high school, and he could be a real dick sometimes.

Shauna looked him dead in the eyes as she made herself a malibu and milk. "Yes." He looked like he was at a loss for words when Shauna turned on her heel and walked back out by the pool. Her eyes instinctually scanned the crowd for Jackie. She was laying out on a pool chair and Mari was rubbing sunscreen on her back. Shauna was standing across the yard and could see her bright green eyes in the sunlight. She watched her laugh and she watched Mari's hands on her back. Jeff walked up to her with a cup, which she accepted with a smile and a kiss on the cheek. This is what Jackie wanted her life to be. Shauna just didn't seem to fit into that mold anymore. Jackie looked up at her and for a second her smile faltered. Made sense, one look at Shauna ruined her whole mood. Shauna looked down at her drink and finished it off. She went back inside to refill it and found that to be her routine for the night. Get a drink, look at Jackie smiling with her boyfriend and her new best friend, finish her drink, repeat. By the end of the night she was fucking hammered. She watched Jackie run her hands through Jeff's hair as they laughed and flirted by the fire. She watched her kiss his neck and watched how much he liked the feeling. Jackie let her hair down from her ponytail, and Shauna couldn't tear her eyes away as it fell around her shoulders. She took a very long drink and got comfy leaning up against the house. Felt like this was going to be a long night. A few hours later, Jackie walked up to her and let her know they were leaving.

"Oh you're ready to reassociate with me now?"

"Seriously? You walked away from me!" Shauna rolled her eyes. Sure, because if Jackie had to chase Shauna for a change the world might start falling apart. "Come on, Shipman. I just thought you didn't want to hang out with Mari. I was trying to let you have your space." Like Shauna ever seemed to want space from her.

"You're right. I didn't." Shauna slurred her words and Jackie sighed. She threw her arm under Shauna's shoulders and walked her to the car.

"Jeff, babe drop me off first okay? My mom's gonna be pissed if I'm late." Shauna rolled her eyes. Her house was further away than Shauna's and they both had the same curfew. It was infuriating how everything seemed to revolve around Jackie Taylor. When Jeff pulled up to her house, Shauna got out of the car to sit in the passenger seat. Jackie opened her arms

and she fell into them, like a routine. This was Jackie's way of declaring they weren't mad at each other anymore. Like it was just that easy. She was bitter, but the second Jackie smiled at her she felt herself smiling back. Maybe she had just been being dramatic.

"Love you, Jackie." Jackie smiled at her and turned around, walking back to the house. Sometime a few years ago, Jackie had stopped saying it back. Shauna didn't notice it at first, but now it really did sting, which she realized might have been why she kept trying. Maybe some sick part of her liked how easy it was for Jackie to hurt her. She got back into Jeff's truck and he started to drive away.

"I'll get you home by 1, Shauna. No need to worry." He was trying to be sweet, but Shauna just really fucking hated him. He was always so smug, but again, he had reason to be. He was dating Jackie Taylor. Shauna looked over at him, sitting in his swim trunks and letterman jacket. He looked like a fucking tool, but he had Jackie's hair tie on his wrist and he was smiling like an asshole. Shauna glared at him until she noticed that Jackie's lipstick had rubbed off on his neck. Fuck this, actually. Shauna felt sick. She couldn't take her eyes off of it. She felt drawn to it.

"Pull over."

"What?"

"Fucking pull over, Jeff!" Jeff pulled onto an old dirt road, tucked in the trees and Shauna opened the door.

"What the fuck, Shauna?" She ignored him, waiting for her stomach to settle a bit before getting back in the truck. "Did you just throw up?"

"No." He looked at her and Shauna noticed him looking down at her tits. What a fucking idiot. He had Jackie Taylor and was busy staring at Shauna's boobs.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Jeff." He reached out and tried to rub her back. Shauna could've ripped his arm off and beat him with it. She looked up at him, ready to try her best until she realized not only was it Jackie's lipstick on his neck, but also a fucking hickey. She glared even harder at him and he looked a little scared, although that didn't stop him from letting his eyes wander. Shauna looked at him with hatred, and then at the marks Jackie had left on his skin. She wanted her to find a man, right? Shauna leaned in and kissed him. He wasted no time in kissing her back. He didn't hesitate until Shauna had undone his pants.

"Wait, wait. Is this a good idea?"

"Shut the fuck up, Jeff." He nodded and let her climb on top of him. She didn't even think, otherwise she might've decided that this was the worst possible thing she could do. Jeff pulled at the pants Jackie had picked out for her until she had nothing but her bikini on.

"Jesus Christ. You're…" Shauna sighed, frustrated that he wanted to keep fucking talking. She leaned down and kissed him, pushing herself down on Jeff's dick. It hurt, but she was in complete control of the situation. She lowered herself carefully, clinging to Jeff's neck as she let herself adjust. Jeff was moaning, which was kind of pissing Shauna off, but as soon as she felt okay enough to continue, she forgot it. All she could feel was full. Shauna moaned softly and let her head fall into the crook of Jeff's neck. She opened her eyes and

saw the lipstick. She moaned immediately into his ear, knowing that Jackie had been there first. She smelled her perfume and kissed softly at the skin, feeling herself get off on it. Jeff's hand made its way up Shauna's thigh and she looked down at Jackie's hair tie. Shauna threw her head back down on his neck and started to pick up the pace. She thought about Jackie's hands running through Jeff's hair and the way he smiled when she had been kissing this same spot. She was breathing heavy and could feel herself starting to tense up. She thought about Jackie taking her hair down earlier and letting it fall around her shoulders before laughing with Jeff and letting him touch her. She wondered what Jackie would think about this? Would she still try so hard to make Shauna seem like her perfect little sidekick? Shauna sucked hungrily on the lipstick and tasted it on her tongue. She moaned louder and felt her pussy tense around Jeff's dick. "Oh, fuck. Fuck." Jeff moaned and Shauna knew what was about to happen. She jumped off of him as fast as she could and Jeff came all over her stomach.

"Thanks for the warning." Shauna scoffed at him, pulling her pants back up and using an old shirt to clean herself up.

"Sorry, I just— fuck, Shauna. What did we do?" He looked distressed.

"She doesn't have to know. It doesn't have to happen again. Come on, I'm late." Jeff put himself away and they spent the rest of the ride in silence. Shauna got home and into the shower. She threw up, feeling the guilt overwhelm her and sat down on the acrylic floor. She felt the hot water run over her body until it turned cold, now very aware of what she had done. She skipped out on journaling about it, unable to put into words why she had chosen to do it or how she felt about it. All she felt was fucking guilty.

Chapter 2

Next time, it was worse. Shauna drove them both to Jeff's birthday party at Randy's house. Jackie had offered her up, which obviously pissed her off. She was seconds away from offering herself and when Jackie beat her to it and turned her favor into an order Shauna felt her skin get hot. Turns out, sleeping with Jeff and refusing to journal about it like she journaled about everything else was pretty detrimental to the careful management of her anger issues she had dedicated herself to the last three years. Again, Jackie asked to be dropped off first. God forbid she spent any alone time with Shauna after a night with Jeff. They had disappeared an hour and a half into the night and didn't come back until they were demanding to be taken home. Shauna knew what was happening. She knew Jackie probably had her mouth wrapped around Jeff's dick in Randy's bedroom upstairs. She knew the sounds he was making. She knew the way Jackie's big bright eyes probably looked staring up at him. She waited 20 minutes for Jackie to make her way back, but she didn't. Eventually, Shauna went to find anything else to think about. She found Nat by the fire pit outside. She was sitting by herself just staring at the fire and when she noticed Shauna she passed her a cigarette without a second thought. They didn't say a word, but Shauna smoked a bit and felt herself getting less and less angry. It felt nice to be able to breathe for a change, even though she fucking hated the taste of cigarettes. When Shauna got to Jackie's house, she turned to the backseat, not sure what she was expecting. Jackie thanked her for driving, hugged her over the center console and again, refused to tell Shauna she loved her back.

She was watching the girl walk into her house, her hair blowing in the wind and her bright eyes twinkling in the porch lights. She realized she was staring long after Jackie had shut her front door and turned on her bedroom light upstairs. Shauna was brought out of her trance by Jeff trying to kiss her. Shauna knew he was drunk and it was his birthday, but in Jackie's driveway? Was he fucking serious? Shauna grabbed him by his face and pushed him harder than she intended to into the passenger window.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Shauna pretty much screamed at him.

"Fuck Shauna that hurt!"

"Good! You fucking moron. It was supposed to."

Jeff held the back of his head that would probably have a bump tomorrow and Shauna started the car. Halfway to Jeff's house she pulled over without a word. Before Jeff could open his mouth Shauna turned to him, "Not a fucking word. Seriously."

Shauna got into her backseat and Jeff eagerly followed, undoing his belt as he plopped himself into her car. Shauna pulled her skirt up around her hips and lowered herself onto him. He moaned and Shauna felt her eyes roll without even putting any thought into it. It didn't hurt as much this time, and Shauna closed her eyes trying to focus on enjoying it. Jeff reached out and grabbed her face to pull her down into a kiss. Shauna obliged, willing to do anything to shut him up. She pulled his bottom lip into her mouth, biting and sucking on it. She felt his hand on her face, holding her chin to guide her closer to him. She recognized the smell on his fingers from all the nights she had spent alone in her bedroom. Shauna's eyes snapped open.

They didn't look any different. They were just normal fingers, but she knew where they had been. Jeff had fingered Jackie earlier that night. That's what they had been doing upstairs. She picked up the pace and started moaning into his hand. He tried to move it to get a better grip on her hips and she grabbed him by his two fingers. She looked at him and tried to put on a show of sucking on his fingers, knowing he'd be too dense to think twice about it. She wanted him to think it was for him, and she herself was probably just going to ignore it, but she knew deep down that sucking on the same fingers he had used to get Jackie off hours ago didn't have much to do with Jeff at all. Shauna watched Jeff's eyes roll back in his head and sighed in relief. He wasn't watching her anymore, now she could just focus on consuming the taste of it, the smell of it. She felt herself getting close and leaned down hoping to smell her on his neck. She wondered if Jackie orgasmed on his fingers earlier. She wondered how much Jackie liked sucking his dick. She thought about the noises she would make and wondered if her eyes rolled back in her head the same way Jeff's did. Before she knew it, her body was shaking on top of Jeff's and she knew it was time to jump off of him. He did a better job of controlling himself now, and finished himself off into Shauna's practice shirt that was sitting in her backseat. By the time his breathing had slowed and he started to pull his pants back up, Shauna was back on the road driving him the rest of the way to his house.

The more they did it, the worse Shauna's jabs at Jackie got. The more they hurt her, the worse her anger got. Every time, they said they were never going to do it again, and every time they lied about it. Two months later, it was their state championship game. Of course, Jackie had been the one to win the game. She had been the one to make up for Shauna's mistake. The mistake she had made fucking protecting her. The midfielder on the other team had been shoving Jackie over all fucking game, and when she 'mistimed' her slide tackle, Shauna had seen red. The next play, she 'accidentally' hip checked the girl straight on her ass. She got yellow carded and saw Jackie's furrowed brow of disappointment as she pulled her off the ground. They had won the game, but that didn't stop Jackie from chewing her out in the car on the way home.

"When we get to Nationals you can't do that shit, you know." Shauna rolled her eyes.

"She was being a cunt, I don't feel bad."

"You shouldn't do it at all, but why the fuck would you pick our half of the field to give them a free kick from? She had also been shoving Laura Lee on the other half of the field all night. I get what you were trying to do, but just use your head Shipman." Shauna was the 'team's' enforcer, but truly she didn't give a fuck about anybody else getting shoved around. She was Jackie's enforcer. She always had been.

"Well maybe the holy spirit possessed me to put her on her ass in that exact moment." Jackie laughed and closed her eyes, trying to stay mad.

"Spoken like a true Catholic." It was Shauna's turn to laugh.

"God do you remember how stressed my mom was? All because I liked the sad saint stories. I had my poor jewish mother stressed the fuck out." Jackie laughed again and smiled at her.

"At least we got Christmakkuh out of it." Shauna's mom had combined the holidays when she went through her religious phase, and even though the religion didn't stick, the holiday

certainly had. Shauna nodded. “So… Carson’s throwing that party tomorrow night. I told him we’d be there.” Of course she did.

The party was the same as always, Shauna drank, Jackie ditched her and all Shauna could do was watch her with Jeff from across the room. They left for Nationals the next day and Shauna knew she’d get alone time then, but still… it sucked to be ditched. When Jackie and Jeff disappeared Shauna ditched the mixed drink and decided to just take shots of rum instead. By the time she got in the truck, she was sloshed. Jackie was pretty much ignoring her but what was new, really? Jackie got out, hugged her goodbye and ignored Shauna’s I love you, per usual. Jeff barely got past her street before Shauna had him pulled over.

“We said we weren’t gonna do this again,” Jeff protested.

“We’re not.” Shauna pulled him into the backseat and kissed him the way she had seen him kissing Jackie. She wanted him, more than she had before. She straddled him and pressed herself down. She moaned and felt herself wrap around his dick. He grunted at the feeling and Shauna kissed him again to shut him up.

“Oh, fuck. Shauna.” He moaned her name and Shauna felt sick. She ground her hips back down on him.

“Tell me you love me.” He paused, but Shauna didn’t. She sat up, continuing to push her hips up and down. “I won’t hold you to it. Just say it. Please.” Jeff’s eyes rolled back, reacting to her movements and he nodded frantically, not wanting her to stop

“I love you, Shauna. Fuck, I love you.” Shauna desperately grabbed him behind his neck and started speeding up the pace. She got a whiff of Jackie’s perfume and started kissing where she had left it behind. It felt like she left it just for Shauna. Jeff reached up and pulled down Shauna’s dress to expose her chest. He grabbed her tit with his rough hand and squeezed it. Shauna thought about how Jackie would react to the same touch and pressed her face into Jeff’s neck. She smelled him again, biting gently at the skin, wanting to taste it. “Fuck… I love you,” Jeff moaned. When she heard it she orgasmed almost immediately. She jumped off of him and fell backwards, leaning against the opposite door. Jeff sat up and started to jack himself off. He used one hand to stroke himself and the other to continue fondling Shauna’s tits. He looked at her like he was scared to say something.

“What?”

“Could you?… I want you to…” He was terrified, and in some way that turned Shauna on. She wondered if the taste of Jackie’s lipgloss would have lingered on his dick. Shauna looked up at him and replaced his hand with hers. He moaned and held onto the passenger seat headrest. Shauna leaned forward and took it in her mouth, realizing that this was probably a little backwards, fucking him like 4 times before she ever sucked his dick. Shauna closed her eyes, trying to imagine Jackie loving this. Shauna ran her tongue up the sides of his dick, looking at his reactions to her every move. She tried to dream up the taste of Jackie’s lipstick as she took Jeff deeper in her mouth, working it in and out and flicking her tongue over his tip with every pass made. She knew that Jackie refused to let him cum in her mouth, and Shauna wanted to be better than her at something. Better than her at anything. She took his dick to the back of her throat, refusing her instinct to choke on it. “Oh, god. I’m gonna—” he tried to pull out of her mouth and Shauna wrapped her hands around his ass, holding him in her mouth. He moaned loudly, realizing what she wanted and let himself fill

her mouth with cum. Shauna felt more inclined to gag than she had when his dick was in the back of her throat. Jeff collapsed back into the seat and Shauna pulled her dress up as she jumped out of his truck. She spit his cum in the grass and sat back down in the passenger seat.

"Come on, Jeff. I'm gonna be late." He laughed and made his way back to the driver's seat.

The next day they got on the plane for Nationals. Jackie had stolen some Valium from her mom's stash to help Shauna sleep on the flight. She was fucking terrified of flying, always feeling like they were seconds from just dropping out of the sky. The kind gesture certainly made Shauna feel like shit. She knew she was fucking awful for what she had done. She knew that it was evil and conniving and hurtful and selfish, but the problem with that was she already saw herself that way, long before she started acting on it. Shauna sighed and took the drugs, grateful that they would knock her out and stop her endless thought spiral.

They won every game up until the final. Shauna didn't really care. She was just glad to have had the alone time with Jackie. The first night she knew she had too much shit pent up. She was angry and Jackie was actually being very sweet. She felt awful about the way they were fighting, so she took her journal and stomped out of their shared hotel room. She found a quiet conference room and let every detail of her dirty little secret find its way onto the page. She didn't even read it once she was done, having no idea what she had written and no intention to really know. The next two days were perfect. Shauna chose to ignore all the awful things she had been doing and just experience the trip with Jackie. When they lost that last game, she didn't even care. Shauna never wanted to play soccer. Winning the game wouldn't get her another night in the hotel room, so it didn't matter to her. When the plane landed Jackie was asleep on her shoulder. She soaked in the feeling before shaking her awake. Back to reality they went. Jackie made sure to start it off strong, grabbing her bag for her and giving her instructions on how to exit a plane. Like she was a fucking dumbass. She snapped at her and she knew that it was mean and that it probably wasn't a good look in front of the rest of the team, but Shauna just didn't give a fuck. In the car, Jackie finally called her on it. She asked if they should get something to eat and Shauna rolled her eyes at her and huffed like a child.

"Shauna, what's wrong? I know the game sucked, but snapping at me every 3 seconds isn't helping anything." Shauna took a deep breath, stopping herself from snapping back. She knew she was right. She knew she was being unfair. Shauna was the one being a fucking dickhead, not Jackie. She just hated how Jackie always tried to tell her how she felt. Like… Shauna didn't give a fuck about the game, but Jackie didn't know her well enough to know that. She assumed she did, and she was wrong, but Shauna just had to take it as fact. Now she had to just be upset about the game. She smiled at Jackie, putting on the best mask she could and tried to make it seem like she wasn't ready to put a hole in the window. Jackie clocked it obviously, and Shauna could tell how upset she was. She sighed.

"Jackie, look I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you, it's just the game. You're right, some food will make me feel better. Thank you for thinking of it." Jackie immediately dropped it and went back to her usual chipper self. Yeah, Shauna really felt like shit.

"Obviously, babe, that's what best friends are for," Shauna looked over to see her reading a magazine. That's what they were? Best friends? Shauna looked ahead at the road,

completely lost in her thoughts. She hated herself, and she hated Jackie almost as much. More than both of them, Shauna hated Jeff. There was nothing she felt like she enjoyed anymore. She wasn't happy. The worst part was as much as she hated Jackie, the closest she came to happiness was when she was with her, yet all she fucking did was awful things to her. Shauna parked in front of her house and Jackie turned to her.

"See you later tonight, yeah?" Shauna's eyes dropped to her lap. She really did not want to go to another party. She didn't want to fall into the backseat of Jeff's truck again. She didn't want to watch Jackie dance on him and kiss him all night. She knew that realistically she could just… not do those things, but it didn't feel that easy. Shauna had always had a self destructive streak, but it used to be somewhat easy to suppress. Now… she didn't feel in control of her emotions or her actions at all.

"What was that?" She was caught.

"What was what?" Shauna refused to look up at her, suddenly finding the trees that lined her street very interesting.

"Your face, Shauna." Shauna rolled her eyes, "Do you not want to go?" No. Shauna never wanted to fucking go. She would rather drink at home alone with Jackie. Would that be so fucking awful?

"Jackie, we just lost nationals. We spent all day on a plane and I think I'm still feeling the aftereffects of the Valium you gave me. No, I really don't want to go to some party where your lame ass boyfriend and Randy fucking Walsh try to tell me that we tried our best. I'm not kidding, I might actually get physically violent." Shauna looked up and Jackie looked like Shauna had just told her she never wanted to speak to her again. Was it really that serious? She watched Jackie quickly retrain her face and turn the sad look to an eye roll.

"You're going Shauna. The whole team is going. You have to go. We can hang out, you and me. I'll make sure my lame ass boyfriend doesn't say anything to you." Jackie huffed and looked out her window. Shocker, Shauna didn't get a say. At Mari's birthday she was ruining their chance at a state title and now even though she is no longer on the team since their senior season just ended, somehow she's still letting them down by hanging out by herself for a night? It was fucking annoying. Shauna rolled her eyes and looked over at her. She had tears in her eyes, which completely changed Shauna's mind. She had been angry and bitter, and now she just wanted to make the girl feel better. It was hard to realize that what she said and what she did actually could hurt her. It felt like Jackie couldn't be touched by anything, but now here she was about to cry in Shauna's car. Fuck.

"He's not actually lame Jackie, I'm sorry." She deserved an apology, she probably deserved a thousand, but Shauna could start with that one.

"No, he's a little bit lame," Jackie said with a laugh, "but please, you HAVE to go." Like it was all just over. Shauna felt like shit now and STILL didn't have a say in any of it.

"Yeah Jackie, I'm aware." She was bitter again, but Jackie didn't even seem to notice.

"I'm coming over at 7 to get ready." Jackie said as she climbed out of Shauna's car. Shauna caught herself watching her lift herself up off of the seat and pulling her skirt down as she stood up, coving up the skin on her upper thighs. When she turned around, Shauna gave her a tight lipped smile.

"See you then, Jax. Love you." Jackie shut the door, waved goodbye and walked through her front door. It felt like she twisted the knife that now permanently lived in Shauna's abdomen. Were all these bad decisions really even helping? She hated herself, no change. She watched Jackie abandon her for her asshole boyfriend, no change. The only difference now was Shauna was getting laid, but part of her hated that too. It felt fucking evil and she walked around with a constant weight on her chest like her life was going to fall apart at any moment.

When Shauna got home, she grabbed the mail and sifted through it, expecting to find nothing but junk mail and unpaid bills, but sitting right at the bottom of the pile was a letter from Brown University. She ran inside and into her mom's bedroom. She felt bad for waking her, but she knew that it couldn't wait and if she opened it without her mom, Deb would be pissed.

"Mom, mom, mom," she held the letter up, "It's from Brown." Deb sat up in bed and smiled wide at her daughter.

"Open it, open it!" Shauna nodded and tore it open, reading the first line out loud. 'Dear Ms. Shipman, Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that you have been admitted to Brown University this upcoming Fall 1996.' Shauna's jaw dropped and she looked up at her mom, who was beaming at her. She wasn't going to let herself get too excited. "It's expensive."

"You'll get a scholarship."

"Not a full ride."

"We will make it work, baby." Shauna looked at her and she opened her arms. Shauna fell into them, finally letting herself be happy about it. "You got into an Ivy!"

"I got into an Ivy…" Shauna couldn't believe it. She knew that at her high school she was smart and she did well, but now it was like out of everybody in the country she still had a spot on that list. Deb pulled away and looked at her, placing her hands on Shauna's cheeks.

"What are you gonna say to Jackie?" Shauna sighed and let her head fall into her hands. Deb reached out to rub her back, "She'll understand, baby. She'll be happy for you. She's your best friend." She would not understand. This would just be another thing on the list of reasons why Shauna was a complete disappointment. This was just another thing that would hurt her.

"I just… I don't want to say anything yet. I'll wait until graduation, just in case." Deb nodded, seeming unsure of her plan but not wanting to overstep. "Get some sleep mom, I'll start dinner in a couple hours." Shauna turned and walked back out into the living room, staring at the acceptance letter the whole way. They were offering her a base academic scholarship from the university and there was information on more that she could apply to. Maybe she really could do this. She had no clue that she would actually get in and applied more on a whim than anything. Her and Jackie had planned to go to Rutgers… or Jackie had planned that for them, but *Brown?* She could actually be successful in this whole writing thing. She could go to a school that knew how to help her. She knew this would hurt Jackie, and she knew she probably should've told her a long time ago that she applied, but Shauna wasn't ashamed of it… she was excited.

Chapter 3

Shauna took a power nap to try to shake off whatever was left of the Valium in her system. When she woke up she made spaghetti for her and her mom to eat before Jackie got there. She put some on a plate and walked it into her bedroom, gently waking her up to let her know it was there. She cleaned up the dishes from dinner and brought her own plate up to her room. She put *The Bends* by radiohead in her CD player and sat at her desk eating dinner. She decided she was going to show some restraint that night. She wasn't going to fuck Jeff, she wasn't going to just sit and stare. As much as Jackie pissed her off tonight, she refused to make things worse for herself. She opened up her journal, trying to proactively work out her stresses and her anger. She wrote the date at the top of the page and let her hand write out everything on her mind.

I'm going to stop. No matter what she does or says, no matter what she leaves behind on him, I am not falling into her trap. When she blows me off I will go find somebody else to hang out with. I have a plan in place. I'm not going to let her ruin my fucking life.

She looked at the page and recognized that she sounded fucking crazy. Jackie wasn't setting traps, she wasn't leaving pieces of herself on him for Shauna, but that's what the journal was for. It was for her to be fucking awful and mean and toxic so that she didn't treat anybody like that in real life. Yeah, her plan was going fantastically so far. She shut the cover and looked through her closet for something to wear. She wanted to wear something sophisticated. She was going to Brown, afterall. She found a skirt and brown button up short sleeve shirt. It was silky and she liked the way it looked. As she laid out her different options, her mom knocked on the door.

"I'm headed to work, honey. Congratulations, again. I'm working a double. Be back tomorrow." Shauna nodded and let her mom kiss her forehead. Even though she felt a little old for it, it was comforting, and Shauna could use all the comfort she could get.

She tried a couple things on, but didn't love anything, really. The brown shirt didn't fit her the way she thought it would and she was starting to stress about it. Maybe being sophisticated wasn't for her. Maybe this new life wasn't for her. When Jackie walked in she was in her bra and a pair of shorts, so her voice made her jump.

"Trying on outfits without me, Shipman?" Jesus Christ. She took a deep breath, remembering what she had written down earlier. She had a plan.

"You know I do actually dress myself every day, right?" Jackie laughed, but Shauna wasn't really joking.

"You can't wear a flannel to the party, Shauna. Regardless of how good you might make it look." Shauna squinted at her, trying to figure out if that was actually a compliment. Definitely didn't feel like one. Maybe she liked her flannels. Maybe she felt comfortable in her flannels. She sighed and fought the urge to roll her eyes. Jackie sat down on her desk, blocking the light from her lamp. Shauna looked up at her. She looked perfect, obviously.

She wore this blue floral dress that dipped down into a v neck. Her legs were perfectly tanned and toned. They weren't bulky, like Shauna's. She had a white jacket in her hand and she tossed it down on Shauna's bed. Shauna felt Jackie's eyes on her, probably doing the same thing Shauna had been doing all afternoon… trying to figure out if she owned any clothes that she actually looked good in. She turned back to her closet.

"Jeff called me earlier…" Shauna's heart felt like it was sitting in her throat. She refused to look at Jackie, scared that she'd be able to read her face immediately. 'He said that Randy asked about you today.' Shauna stopped looking through the clothes, standing there frozen. Fucking Randy? Shauna hated Randy. Jackie hated Randy! Was that really what she thought Shauna wanted? No, she knew that Shauna didn't want him. She must have thought that Randy was the best it would ever get for her. She thought Randy was what she deserved. Shauna felt her face getting hot and her stomach start to turn. She took a couple deep breaths, pretending to continue looking through stuff in her closet. "He wanted to make sure you were coming tonight. I think he's interested." Shauna couldn't stop herself from looking up at Jackie, trying to figure out if she was fucking serious. She was. Jackie was dead serious. What the fuck? Was Shauna really that ugly? Was she really that undesirable?

She snapped, "Do you seriously think I am interested in Randy fucking Walsh? I understand that you and Jeff are this perfect couple, and I understand that you'd want to put me with somebody who fits into your double date mold, but fucking Randy?" Jackie recoiled at her words, which might have been fair. Shauna pretty much yelled them at her, but it wasn't like they weren't true.

"Jesus Shauna just because he's interested doesn't mean I'm forcing you to fuck him, I just thought you'd want to know when someone asked about you." Fine, but Randy? Seriously? Surely Jackie knew that was ridiculous. If Shauna could never do better than Randy fucking Walsh then she was going to spend the rest of her life alone. He was NEVER going to be an option.

"Well for future reference, not when it's Randy. He's the dumbest kid in our grade Jackie. It's a little insulting." Now Jackie seemed intrigued. Shauna went back to her closet, getting more and more frustrated.

"So who would you be okay with me setting you up with?" What? That was entirely beside the point.

"What? No one Jackie, that's not what I meant."

"I don't know if I believe you, do you have a crush on somebody?" Here we go. She didn't, but if she did Jackie would have to make sure he was up to standard. Not Shauna's, but hers. He'd have to be an athlete, and he'd have to be less attractive than Jeff, and of course under Jackie's control.

"No. No, Jackie, we're leaving in less than 6 months. Why would I get with anybody right now?"

"We can't go to college virgins, Shauna." Shauna felt her body tense up, and she looked over at Jackie, pretending to look at her outfit instead of reeling from the suggestion that she wanted to fuck Jeff. Also, Jackie was the only one in the entire scenario who was still a virgin, which Shauna felt like shit about too. Not only did she lose her virginity without

telling Jackie, but she did it with her boyfriend, taking that away from her too. She was so fucked up in the head.

"So you and Jeff then?" She asked, looking away as quickly as she could.

Jackie shrugged. "It has to be someone, right? Aren't you supposed to lose it to your high school sweetheart?" Shauna's eyes hit the ground. Jackie really wanted to fuck Jeff. She felt her heart sink and felt jealousy wash over her, which was weird. She didn't even like Jeff, and she had fucked him first anyway. Jackie continued, "I don't know, should I just do it tonight? Get it over with?" Shauna couldn't get her muscles to relax to save her life. What the fuck was wrong with her? This conversation should not have made her feel like she wanted to go crash her car into the nearest light pole.

She started to just say words without thinking about what they were, focused instead on controlling her body language. "Doesn't that kind of defeat the whole purpose of wanting it to be special?"

"Well it's *Jeff,* Shauna of course it would be special." Right… of course it would be. It always felt *super* special when Shauna fucked him. She gave up and picked a dress that she knew Jackie would approve of. She had been the one to pick it out at the store. Typically, Shauna would've intentionally picked something she knew Jackie wouldn't like just to start an argument, but she was going to be better than that tonight. She took her shorts off and pulled the dress over her head. She was trying to zip it up herself when Jeff started honking in the driveway.

"Could you help me?" Shauna turned to Jackie, who was apparently just watching her struggle. Shauna looked at herself in the mirror as Jackie zipped it up. She felt a little nervous as Jackie walked over, but she couldn't really figure out why. Probably had something to do with Shauna fucking her boyfriend and lying to her about it.

"Your boobs look amazing in that." Shauna looked down at them, trying to see what Jackie saw.

"You think?" Jackie smiled at her in the mirror and Shauna felt her face get hot.

"Yes babe. It's working." Shauna smiled softly and rolled her eyes. She was never great at taking a compliment. She always felt like there was some kind of joke mixed in that she just couldn't pick up on. Jackie walked out of her bedroom and Shauna took one last look in the mirror. The dress had a bit of a natural push up bra look. Maybe her tits did look good.

Despite her promise to actually hang out at the party, and to nobody's surprise, Jackie spent the night with Jeff's arm wrapped around her. Shauna drowned out all of her disappointment in Malibu milk, using getting a new drink as an excuse to no longer sit there staring at the two of them together. When she came back from her 5th refill, Jackie had her legs wrapped around Jeff's waist on the dining room table. Jeff's hands were up her dress on the sides of her thighs and she was kissing him. Like *really* kissing him. Maybe she was actually going to fuck him tonight. Shauna's head was already spinning but she downed her drink anyway and tried to look away, gluing her eyes to the ground. She watched as Jeff walked out of the house, dragging Jackie out with him. Jackie looked up at her as she walked through the door, a wide smile on her face. Actually fuck her whole life. She hated these fucking parties. Shauna refilled her drink with pretty much just rum, maybe a splash of milk

and she walked out back to the firepit. She saw Nat sitting all alone and crashed into the seat next to her. Nat looked up at her surprised, "Wow. Not sure Princess Jackie would love you hanging out with such a lowlife."

"Not sure Princess Jackie has much of a say who I hang out with."

Nat smiled, "She doesn't?" Shauna shot a glare at her and took a drink. Nat laughed and pulled a joint out of her pocket, lit it and held it to her mouth. It wasn't the first time she had smoked weed, but Jackie insisted she shouldn't do it during season, so it had been a while. Nat offered it to Shauna and she took it gladly, taking three hits before passing it back, then following it with a very long drink of her rum.

"Damn. What the fuck happened to you?" Nat said it while laughing, but Shauna was pretty sure there was at least a little bit of concern there.

"You don't think I'm just sad about soccer like everybody else is tonight?"

Nat looked at her, "No. I'm not sure you give a single fuck what happened at Nationals." Shauna smiled. It was apparently so obvious to fucking Natalie but Jackie didn't have a clue.

"I've always fucking hated soccer." Shauna laughed and Nat did too.

"You wanna know something?" Shauna nodded and Nat continued, 'I think it is the only thing in my life I'm actually good at… and I've always hated it too.' They broke out in laughter and Nat handed the joint back over to her. Shauna watched her eyes look behind her then get wide, "Prepare for impact…" she laughed and kicked her feet up as Shauna turned around.

"Shauna what the fuck are you doing?" Jackie almost screamed it across the backyard. Oh no… Shauna had left her corner in the house and done something without it being Jackie's suggestion first. She rolled her eyes.

"Jesus Christ Jackie I'm smoking a little bit of weed, I'm not fucking hurting anyone." Shauna handed the joint back over to Nat, who was just giggling as it all went down. Jackie scowled at her in a way that Shauna had never seen before.

"She's fucking wasted Nat, you really think giving her weed is a good idea right now?" Shauna rolled her eyes. Of course, Shauna couldn't possibly be choosing to do something by herself, it had to have been Nat's fault.

"Jackie! Fucking relax. Weren't you busy dry humping your boyfriend anyway? Why do you suddenly seem to give a fuck about what I'm doing." Nat started actually laughing. It wasn't her typical chuckle… she was doubled over, laughing. Shauna watched Jackie absolutely lose her mind over it. Shauna was embarrassing her, the cardinal sin.

Jackie looked up at her, making eye contact. The weed must've hit because her eyes were like… mesmerizing. "Come on, Shauna, your ride is leaving." She turned around and broke Shauna out of her trance. Shauna looked at Nat, who offered her one last hit before she ran after Jackie. She didn't turn around, she didn't slow down, but she kept talking, "You're fucking mean when you drink you know?" It hit home. She felt her chest seize up. Shauna was fucking mean all the time. Unfortunately, it wasn't new and it wasn't something she was sure was ever going to change. Jackie made it three steps into the house before covering her mouth with her hand and diving into the bathroom. Fuck, she was gonna puke. When did she

drink that much? Shauna knew that somehow it was her fault. She rushed into the bathroom behind Jackie, shutting the door and grabbing her hair, pulling it back out of her face. She fell to her knees and Shauna sat down behind her. She rested her forehead on the back of Jackie's shoulder and started rubbing her back. She looked like she was fighting the puke.

Shauna leaned in to whisper in her ear, not wanting anybody else at the party to know she was throwing up in the bathroom, "Just let it all out Jax, let it out," she felt her lips brush Jackie's ear. She was so fucked up she had lost all sense of spatial awareness apparently. Jackie finally let it go and when she was done, leaned back into her. She had a tear running down her cheek and just seemed so distraught. Shauna wanted to make her feel better. She held her hair a little higher off of her neck and started to gently blow on it to cool her down. Jackie closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She just wanted to make her feel better. She wanted to comfort her, so she leaned in and kissed the back of her neck. It wasn't sexy and it wasn't anything romantic, nothing different than an innocent kiss on the cheek. She was just comforting her. "Let it out Jackie, it's okay. You'll feel better after." Her words of encouragement must have worked, because Jackie leaned back over and threw up again. Shauna let her hair go and ran her hands through it. Jackie took a deep breath and stood up, beelining out of the bathroom.

They got to the truck, and like always Jackie wanted to be dropped off first. They went through their typical routine and Shauna wanted so badly to tell Jeff to pull over, but she had made a promise to herself. The only problem was Jackie's fucking lipstick on his neck. Again. Shauna was staring at it. She wanted so badly to lean over and lick it off of him. Weed always did this to her. She was fucking dumb to smoke tonight, knowing what her plan had been. Jeff broke Shauna's stare by speaking, "Should I…" Shauna shook her head.

"No. Take me home."

"Oh… okay." Jeff seemed disappointed, something that Shauna literally could not give two fucks about. She got back to her empty house and broke down. She had done the right thing. She didn't fuck Jeff, she was kind to Jackie when she needed help. Why did she still feel like fucking shit? She couldn't sleep. She just laid in bed thinking about Jeff's hands on Jackie's ass. Thinking about the way her dress hung off of her when she sat on the counter and the way that Jeff just looked like he wanted to consume her. She started to get hot, probably from the alcohol and stripped down to her bra and underwear, laying underneath nothing but a top sheet. Jackie's skin had been so warm and soft. Shauna remembered the way her body had been pressed up against her, she remembered Jackie's eyes lingering on her tits in the mirror. Fuck she was high. What the fuck was wrong with her? Eventually she was able to clear her mind enough to fall asleep for a few hours, but she spent most of the night in and out. It was fucking miserable and she was already preparing herself for the awful hangover that was bound to come tomorrow. Hopefully it didn't kill her.

Chapter 4

She woke up to Jackie's hand on her arm. "Oh, wowza, rough morning?" Shauna's head fucking killed and she had no intention of being awake yet. She responded in a long grunt, which Jackie laughed at. Her laugh made the corner of Shauna's lips twitch in a way that almost felt like a smile. Jackie continued, "Come on Shipman, it's 2pm. That hangover is not going away on its own accord." Shauna felt Jackie's fingers on her face, moving her hair away from her eyes, revealing a very put together looking Jackie sitting in front of her. If she wasn't smiling before, she was now.

"Water," Shauna practically begged. Her voice failed her and the word came out more gravelly than it should've. Jackie smiled at her and laughed softly as she looked at her. It was so nice to have a comforting touch and an endearing smile that for a second Shauna forgot how strained their friendship was. Jackie caught her looking at her and stood up. Shauna missed the warmth of her hand.

"I will go get you some water, but you have to get out of bed when I get back." All Shauna could manage was a mhm as she tried to will herself to a seated position. She looked down and remembered that she had no clothes on. She found her dress on the floor and remembered her ability to refuse Jeff. She was a little proud of it, which really just drew attention to how low her bar was. Shauna ran her hands through her hair, hopefully making it look somewhat presentable, and stretched her body out, which didn't feel great, honestly. Her stomach was a wreck. Jackie came back into the room with a glass of water and some kind of pill. She grabbed it and swallowed without even questioning it.

"Thank you." Shauna looked up at Jackie again. She looked very put together. No wonder she laughed when she saw Shauna's state. She had this cute sweater tucked into her plaid skirt. She looked fantastic… and Shauna was in her underwear. "You look nice."

"Yeah, I already puked up all my alcohol this morning." Shauna laughed.

"And last night… Jackie Taylor, can't handle her liquor," she joked, ignoring their fight from the night before.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah Shipman, at least I'm out of bed before 2." Fair. Very fair. Shauna really loved that nickname. Sure, it was just her actual name, but nobody else used it the way Jackie did.

"Touche." Jackie smiled at her and it was like the world stopped spinning. Jackie had that effect on everybody she met. It was just who she was. Shauna groaned as she got out of bed, grabbing the biggest T-shirt she could find and a pair of practice shorts. She could feel Jackie watching her, probably realizing that leaving the house today was not an option.

"Is your mom working today?"

"Yeah. The 10 hour." Jackie nodded. It was normal for her to work like that. All the time. Since Shauna's dad left, she had been working a minimum of 60 hours a week at the hospital to continue adding to her college fund and paying the bills. She had refused to

sacrifice any of it on behalf of him, something Shauna had always admired her for. Jackie nodded, understanding it too. As shitty as Jackie was able to make Shauna feel, she also understood her like nobody else ever could. Every part of Shauna's life that would have to be explained to somebody else, Jackie just knew. She was already part of their little family and Shauna truly felt like shit for the way she was willing to just rip it apart. "Can we just watch movies till she gets home? I feel like garbage and I really don't want to change or shower." Shauna leaned down to grab her dress off the floor and throw it in the hamper.

"Yes of course, babe. Whatever you wanna do." Shauna walked down the stairs and into the kitchen, grabbing microwave popcorn from the cabinet and leaning on the counter while it popped. She refilled her water and popped one of the mints Deb always kept out on the counter into her mouth. When the popcorn was done, she put it in a bowl and grabbed a blanket on her way into the living room. The start credits to Pretty Woman were rolling and Shauna smiled. She would have guessed that Jackie wanted to get her fix of Richard Gere for the day. Jackie noticed her and opened her arms for Shauna to fall into on the couch. She set the popcorn down on the coffee table and let herself be cuddled, feeling Jackie's warm thighs on hers. Jackie wrapped her arm around Shauna's stomach and pulled her in closer. Shauna smiled at the comfort of the gesture. It was nice to be held and to feel somebody else's breathing on her back and neck. Shauna pushed the side of her face into Jackie's arm, living for the skin to skin contact she was getting.

"Don't fall off the couch now," Jackie joked. Shauna took the opportunity to scoot back a little bit, forcing them to be even closer. It wasn't long before Jackie started snoring softly behind her. Shauna smiled and carefully lifted her head to make sure she was covered with the blanket. Her leg was the only part of her that wasn't tucked in, and Shauna debated whether it would be worth potentially waking her up. Settling on refusing to let the girl go cold, Shauna used her foot to cover the rest of Jackie's body. It left her own foot hanging out a little bit, but she figured she'd live. Shauna smiled to herself, thankful that Jackie hadn't wanted to go to the mall or do any other crazy shit. She nestled her head back into Jackie's arm and watched the rest of the movie over her little sleep noises.

The movie ended, and Jackie was still passed out. Shauna didn't really mind the quiet, so she just let the static screen play. Jackie had moved a bit in her sleep. She pushed her face into the back of Shauna's shoulder and pulled her in closer, sliding her hand underneath her shirt. Jackie gripped hard one time at the skin on her stomach and Shauna gasped a little bit at the feeling of it. She blushed and made an effort to slow her breathing. That same nervous feeling was back in her chest and Shauna remembered how high she had been the last night. She was starting to understand how girls could kiss their friends when they were drunk. It wasn't exactly the first time Shauna had thought about Jackie before bed, but it was the first time she found herself comparing Jackie and Jeff and not Jackie and herself. It was strange, and now she was clearly showing the aftereffects. Shauna didn't dare move, not wanting to miss out on the new contact Jackie had initiated. She was sure that Jackie would pull her hand away the second she woke up, probably weirded out about how it had gotten there, but she didn't.

Jackie sighed softly in Shauna's ear and Shauna felt her face get hot again. She grabbed at the skin another time and pulled her tighter to her body. It was clear now that she was definitely awake, and apparently not as disturbed as expected. "Oh good morning, Jax,"

Shauna said while turning around just a little bit to try to get a view of her face. She felt Jackie's body stretch a little behind her, but she still didn't remove her hand.

"What time is it?"

"Like 6, I think." Shauna laughed lightly. It had definitely been a while, not that she was complaining.

"Seriously? I've been asleep that long?"

"Mhm… all that shit talk about getting up early and putting yourself together this morning and the first thing you do is take a nap…" Shauna teased.

Jackie chuckled, "Oh, stop it, I was tired! I damn near drank myself to death trying to keep up with you last night." Keeping up? What was she talking about? They barely even saw each other.

"What do you mean trying to keep up with me? You barely even saw me last night." She was genuinely confused.

"Yeah you kept disappearing and coming back with a new drink. I wasn't sure what you were up to but I figured the least I could do was make sure you didn't get plastered by yourself." Shauna tried to turn around, but there wasn't enough room on the couch for it. She tried to think back and remember if maybe she had lost her fucking mind… but no. Jackie and Jeff left and then they *actually* left and Shauna went out back to smoke.

"First of all, I was not the one disappearing, and second of all, hopefully you learned your lesson keeled over that nasty toilet last night." Shauna laughed at her, settling on the opportunity to make fun of her and avoiding the opportunity to start an argument. If Jackie's body hadn't been pressed against her… maybe she would've made a different choice, but who knows.

"Oh shut up Shipman. I was doing my best." Her best was not very good, it turned out. If Shauna had known she was trying to keep up she might've slowed down a bit, or at least kept a better eye on her. No wonder she was throwing up by the end of the night.

"Now that you're done snoring in my ear, can I put Can't Buy Me Love in?" Shauna felt Jackie's hand retreat and she immediately regretted her question. Her skin felt cold and the smile that she didn't even realize was glued to her face fell instantly.

"Yeah, I suppose." Shauna got up off the couch and started to pick through her tapes. It didn't take long for her to find it, and she practically ran back to the couch and Jackie's open arms. When she laid back down, Jackie immediately put her hand back on Shauna's stomach, something that surprised her but also in some weird way excited her too. She smiled, grateful that Jackie wasn't able to see how much she liked the touch. She pushed herself back further into Jackie, getting as close as she could. Without even thinking, Shauna moved her hand to return the touch in some way. It landed on the side of Jackie's thigh, which if she was using her head wouldn't have been her first choice, but oh well. Jackie didn't jump away from the touch, so Shauna left it, realizing that she kind of liked the placement.

Jackie's fingers started to move a bit as the movie played. They traced circles mindlessly on her skin, and Shauna sighed at the touch. It was so soothing, so thoughtlessly kind. She took it as an opportunity to do the same on her thigh, taking advantage of the chance to feel

more of her soft skin. Her mind immediately fell back to last night. Jeff's hands grabbing almost violently at the same skin Shauna was touching now. It pissed her off. She felt Jackie's fingers gently starting to apply more pressure. "That feels nice," she said with a smile. She felt her eyelids start to get heavy and turned over on her back. Shauna let her head rest on Jackie's bicep and she pulled the girl's thigh across her body, unwilling to let go of her just yet. She let herself just savor the feeling of Jackie's skin on hers. "My turn for a nap, okay?" Shauna closed her eyes and heard Jackie's soft laugh.

"Okay Shipman." Shauna ran her hand up and down Jackie's thigh, letting it travel to absorb as much contact as possible. She didn't think much of it until Jackie's hand started to do the same. Shauna started to wonder if she was asleep and just having weird touchy dreams about her best friend due to the trace amounts of marijuana still in her system from the last night. She decided that either way she didn't care, all she could do was try to control her breathing and let it happen. Shauna wanted more of her. She wanted to pull Jackie's thigh into her hip and hear the sounds she made when she did. Jackie's nails gently dragged across Shauna's stomach, slowly making their way up. Shauna definitely didn't want this to stop. Dream or not, the feeling of being under Jackie's hands was way too compelling. She sunk her fingers a little deeper into Jackie's thigh, trying to silently convey that it was okay. She was scared to open her eyes. Scared to do anything that would snap Jackie out of whatever was going on right now. The pads of Jackie's fingers reached the fabric of Shauna's bra and Shauna couldn't control the way her breath hitched in her throat when she felt it. She wanted Jackie's fingers to push underneath, or at least on top of it. She wanted Jackie to feel her. She wanted her to feel every centimeter of her, but she didn't. She moved her hand back down to Shauna's side, squeezing gently at her waist. Shauna sighed and slowed the movement of her hand, now very confused and disappointed. She had just fallen asleep when the garage door opened. Jackie jumped and pulled her hand out from underneath Shauna's shirt, like her mom would think twice about any of it.

"Shauna, babe. Your mom's home. No nap for you," she said. It was quick and panicky, but kind of cute. She was flustered.

Shauna groaned, "I hope she brought food." She had. Deb walked in with pizza and Shauna attacked it. She hadn't eaten yet and it was like 6:30. After dinner, Shauna dropped Jackie off at her house. She had decided that if it was even real, it didn't mean anything. Had she wanted Jackie to grab her tits? Maybe… but she was probably just still high.

The next morning, Shauna called to ask if Jackie wanted to go to the mall. She missed her, and she was deep down a little worried to let the girl hang out with Jeff. She really got a bad feeling anytime she thought about the two of them fucking. She knew it was bound to happen, but she figured offering other options wouldn't hurt anyone. Jackie didn't hesitate to accept the offer and they spent the day eating shitty mall food and trying on new bikinis for the summer.

The next night, Jeff dropped her off at Shauna's house. As far as Shauna could remember they hadn't talked about her coming back over, but she wasn't complaining. Jackie walked into her bedroom with an overnight bag on a Sunday. Shauna looked up from her journal and laughed, "You moving in?"

"I would if I could, but no. Just staying the night." Shauna smiled at her and looked back down at her journal, trying to focus her energy on productive outlets. Jackie started to unpack

her backpack, seemingly to do some homework on Shauna's bed. "I told my mom that pretty soon we'd be moving in together at Rutgers anyway, so what would it hurt?" Shauna didn't look up, instead glancing at the desk drawer she was keeping her letter in. Now was the time. She needed to tell her, but instead she just wrote it down.

Just fucking tell her. Just tell her. She's your friend, regardless how fucking awful you are to her. It's an Ivy league school she will understand. You know that she will… so why can't you just open your mouth?

She realized she hadn't responded yet, so she tried to think of anything to say, "You have English with Ms. Allen, right?" Jackie didn't respond. It was stupid. What a dumb thing to ask. Why would she need to know that? Fucking dumb.

"Wow… you could've just told me you wanted to stock up on alone time." Shauna picked her pen up off the page and turned to look at her.

"What are you talking about?"

Jackie crossed her arms and gave Shauna a knowing look, "You think after all these years I can't notice when you try to avoid something?"

Uh oh. She knew something. Shauna's mouth started to move before she could stop it. There she was, being a complete dick. "What would I be avoiding, Jackie?" She said it like an accusation. She said it like Jackie was the one doing something wrong. God she was a fucking idiot. She watched Jackie's face fall and her arms drop to her sides. She turned and started shoving her notebooks back into her backpack, sending a wave of guilt and regret through Shauna's entire body.

"Jackie, stop. Of course I want you to stay. Why are you losing your shit right now?" Shauna would've said anything to keep her there.

"Fuck I'm sorry." Now Shauna had manipulated her into apologizing for Shauna's secrets and Shauna's outbursts. "I don't know. I think I'm just stressed out." Stressed out? Jackie? Jackie always had perfect control of every situation. There was never really an opportunity for anything to stress her out. She had it all handled.

Shauna dropped her pen entirely, giving Jackie her full attention. "Stressed out about what?"

"I think I'm going to fuck Jeff. Like actually this time. Next weekend." It felt like a fucking gut punch, but Shauna couldn't figure out why. She tried to fix herself, putting on an expression of genuine interest and forcing herself to resist the urge to stare at anything but Jackie.

"What makes you want to do that?" Jackie looked away, thinking.

"He just… wants it, like really badly." Not shocking. "He's been so nice about it, but I know I've been torturing the poor guy. He asked for it the other day and he's never just asked outright before." Shauna flinched. Part of her thought about telling her that she had been fucking him right there. Maybe then Jackie wouldn't feel so bad for him and then maybe she'd stay with Shauna. Maybe then she wouldn't end up in the same backseat Shauna had spent so many drunken nights lately. But Jackie wouldn't stay with Shauna if she knew. If

Jackie knew, she would probably never speak to Shauna again. No, Jackie could never know. Shauna couldn't lose her.

"Well, do you want it?" Did Jackie want to have sex with Jeff? Shauna realized after she said it that she didn't want to hear the answer. She did not need Jackie telling her how badly she wanted him.

"I think so. I mean it was my idea I guess, right?" Well… it's not exactly her idea if he's been asking for it. "What am I gonna do, realistically? Most girls lose it at prom, but we weren't here for that, we were busy losing Nationals. I know I want to lose it before Rutgers, and if I wait any longer it'll be kind of mean because I'd be breaking up with him right after." Shauna immediately thought of a couple ways for Jackie to lose it instead, but pushed them aside, promising herself to never ever think about that again. Instead, she convinced herself that since Jeff was cheating on her, Shauna was actually being a good friend trying to come up with ideas for Jackie to not lose her virginity to him. She stared at the corner behind Jackie's head, unwilling to lock eyes with the girl.

"Yeah that makes sense." She moved back to her journal, trying to stop herself from making any very bad decisions or admissions. They spent the next hour or so in silence. Shauna didn't look at her, but it sounded like she was doing more tv watching than homework.

"I'm tired of homework. I'm gonna get ready for bed." Shauna didn't look up at her, just focused on her journal. Despite the overnight bag she had brought, she heard Jackie opened her dresser drawers for clothes to sleep in. She grabbed them and disappeared to go change in the bathroom.

She's really going to fuck him. Of course she is. Why wouldn't she? That's her boyfriend. She listed out all those reasons. The real question is why are you so demented that you're upset about it? Why is it so awful for her to want to do normal shit with her boyfriend? Why is it so awful for her to be happy? You are a sick fuck.

Jackie walked back in and climbed into Shauna's bed. She looked at her for a second, trying to figure out what the fuck her problem was with her and Jeff. She needed to get over herself. Shauna grabbed her own clothes and went to the bathroom to get ready for bed. She washed her face and got dressed, trying to forget every bad thing she's ever done. It wasn't working. She got back to her room and stood in the doorway, looking at Jackie in her clothes, in her bed. Fuck this was awful. What had she gotten herself into? She climbed into bed behind her, wrapping her arms around Jackie's shoulders, finding herself breathing in the scent of her hair. Coconut and vanilla. She sighed and closed her eyes. Jackie reached up and grabbed her forearm, running her fingers up and down it. Shauna opened her eyes to watch the girl's fingers move.

"You're excited right?" Jackie's hand wrapped around her arm and squeezed it, "About Rutgers I mean." Shauna let go of the hold she had on the girl, subconsciously extracting herself from the situation. Jackie grabbed her hand and wrapped herself back up in Shauna's arms. She sighed. She was never going to be able to tell her. She couldn't hurt her like that. Shauna hated the idea of being responsible for it.

"Yeah, Jax. Of course I am. Goodnight." Shauna hated herself. She really, really did. It's a simple sentence. *I got into Brown, and I'm going to go.* She just couldn't do it. She

was able to do everything to hurt Jackie except the one time when it's actually the right thing to do. What a fucking mess.

"Yeah, sorry… Goodnight." Jackie seemed hesitant, and Shauna knew the conversation was coming. Just not tonight. Just please not tonight. Shauna pulled her arm away from Jackie's shoulders and wrapped it around her waist, needing to be as close to her as possible. She pushed a few of her fingers under Jackie's shirt so that they sat right above the waistband of her shorts. She needed the skin contact, but was too scared to risk much more. Jackie sighed and grabbed her forearm with one of her hands before she seemed to drift off. Shauna couldn't sleep, and 30 minutes later Jackie started to moan softly. Shauna realized she was dreaming. She was moaning in her sleep. She pushed her ass back into Shauna and she fought to repress a moan. Just as quickly as it started it was over. Jackie was probably dreaming about Jeff. All that talk about fucking him, about wanting it… God this fucking sucked. Shauna moved her hand to her stomach before she could even think about stopping herself. Jackie got to touch her like that, right? Why couldn't Shauna do the same? Jackie's abs were toned in the best possible way. She traced the outline of them with her fingers, just barely touching the skin. She moved up and down the shape of her muscle and sighed. Why was she like this? So ridiculously self destructive. Jackie took a deep breath and Shauna knew that she was awake. She was pretending not to be, a lot like Shauna had done the day before. She could open her eyes and end this if she wanted to, but she didn't.

Shauna moved her hand up past her abs, now operating in the empty space in between where her hands used to be and where Shauna knew she wanted them. Shauna debated how this would go down and saw no positive outcome for herself. She paused and moved her hand back down to where it was on her waistband. She kept in contact with her skin, but pushed her hand down as far as she could from her tits. She needed to control herself. Jackie pushed her hips back, something that Shauna had NOT been expecting. She let out a little moan and immediately hated herself for it. Sure, maybe the dream was for Jeff, but *that* movement… that was for Shauna. Both of them froze and Shauna knew that Jackie had heard her. Fuck. She pulled away just slightly and before she knew it, Jackie had fallen back to sleep. Obviously she did. It was nothing. Why would it ever be something to lose sleep over? Shauna stared at her alarm clock until 2 am, just waiting for her own eyelids to feel heavy.

Chapter 5

The next morning, Shauna was ready to forget all of it. She felt like it was all just a fever dream, or like she was so tired and lacking sleep that she had made it up. She decided to just move past it. They went to school like normal and Jackie went back to her own house after. Jeff drove her. For some reason, it felt like a slap in the face. It was like a choice to Shauna, even though it was essentially just their routine. Shauna had probably just gotten used to driving Jackie home from practice. Now that she and Jeff were back on the same schedule, Jackie didn't really need her anymore.

When Shauna got home, she pulled out her letter and looked at it. What the fuck was she going to do? Part of her felt like Jackie would kill her, and the other part felt like her absence probably wouldn't even be noticed. Jackie could just hang out with the Jeffs and the Maris at Rutgers and not have to worry about finding ways to get Shauna involved too. She locked the letter back up in her desk drawer and put it out of her mind so that she could get dinner done before her mom left for the night shift.

She spent the night reading and trying to distract herself from everything that Jeff and Jackie were probably doing. She had assumed they were together, why wouldn't they be? The phone rang and Shauna answered without looking up from her book.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Shauna… who's there right now?" Jeff? Seriously, why would he call her?

"Just me. Why are you calling my house?"

"Well… I just didn't know if you'd want me to come pick you up." He really was a fucking moron.

"You're not with Jackie?"

"Just dropped her off, actually." Oh. So she didn't fuck him. Shauna felt a little relieved before realizing how sick it was that Jeff was calling so that she could finish him off.

"You're such a douchebag."

Jeff huffed at her, "Like you're any better?" Yeah. Fair. Shauna was probably worse, actually. She wanted to just hang up the phone, but she thought about what he and Jackie had probably been doing. Had she given him a blowjob? They were at a minimum probably making out. She wondered if Jackie's perfume was on his skin. She took a deep breath, her hesitation very obvious.

"Fuck off." Shauna hung up the phone, unwilling to crack. Instead she pulled out her journal and started trying to relieve some stress.

I never should've even fucked him in the first place. What did I think it was going to do? Break them up so that Shauna and Jackie could just live happily ever after as celibate best friends? I can't even stay fucking celibate now, and I fucking hate Jeff.

This is so fucking sick and twisted. I am genuinely the worst friend and human being on the planet.

Shauna slammed the notebook shut and took a deep breath before going back to her reading. When it came down to actually trying to sleep she decided to take some of her mom's melatonin. Maybe then she wouldn't spend 4 hours thinking about Jackie grinding into her hips or the complexity of how fucked up she was for liking it while also receiving calls from her boyfriend begging to hook up with him again. Thankfully, she passed out almost immediately.

The next morning she picked Jackie up for school, trying not to stare at the way her hair framed her face. She resisted the urge to move a stray piece out of her eyes. It was blocking Shauna's view. She turned her attention to the road and kept it there as Jackie changed her music to the mix she had made to keep in Shauna's car.

"What'd you do last night?" Jackie asked.

"Just read a little, went to bed early."

"Jeff took me to dinner. He drove me into town and we went somewhere other than the diner for a change."

"Oh wow. That's nice." Shauna was trying to be dismissive, hoping that the conversation would go anywhere else.

"Yeah he was really sweet. I feel bad though. He wanted me to invite him inside after and I just… couldn't do it." Shauna raised her eyebrows and Jackie continued, "I just made out with him for a couple minutes and kind of ran out of his car." Shauna was glad she didn't let him pick her up. It clearly wouldn't have been worth it. Jackie was looking at her. Shauna was expected to respond. She was expected to ask questions.

"Why couldn't you do it?"

"God, I don't know. Lottie told me once that it fucking hurt. Maybe I'm just nervous. Like, sometimes tampons are painful. I couldn't imagine trying it with him." Shauna laughed.

"Well I think you're supposed to be like… aroused, right? You'd probably be more into it than you are putting a tampon in." Shauna looked at Jackie's eyes that were now trained on her.

"Yeah you're right. It'll be good as long as I'm… into it." Well that wasn't how the conversation was supposed to go. It was not supposed to make her feel better about fucking him. She had to do some damage control.

"Do you wanna come over tonight? Do some homework… watch a movie?" *Do anything other than fucking your boyfriend… please.*

"Yes actually, but can we do it at mine? I need help with my essay and I left it on my desk." Yes of course she'll hang out, but on her terms and only if Shauna could help her with something. Shauna nodded. Better than nothing.

They laid in bed, Jackie watching Beaches while Shauna read over her essay, and it took everything within her to focus. Jackie had her head in Shauna's lap and her hands on her

thighs. She knew it meant nothing and it was just a mindless gesture, but Shauna couldn't get past the third sentence. It took all night to read three pages. She had to lie and tell Jackie she was just being thorough.

The next day they played soccer for the first time since their loss. Shauna wasn't big on actual organized games and scrimmages, but she liked the way exercise made her feel. She liked feeling her muscles tighten and she liked feeling sore the next day. Jackie continued to mention Jeff like she wanted Shauna to talk her into it. It was infuriating. Did she expect Shauna to get down on her knees and beg her to do it? Every time she did her best to bite her tongue and keep her eyes trained on her journal and the ground, but every time Jackie turned around, every time she was completely focused on a movie or a magazine, Shauna let herself look. She didn't understand what was happening to her. It was like the more she found herself staring at Jackie, the more she wanted to answer Jeff's calls. It felt like she was just watching herself experience things, but had no control over any of it. Her feelings didn't make sense and she felt disconnected from her own thoughts. It was confusing.

They had been at the field for less than an hour when they got rained on. It came completely out of nowhere, and they had to sprint back to Shauna's house. They laughed and turned it into a race, which of course Shauna won. Once they had dried off and changed, Jackie had decided it was time for a nap. Shauna walked into the room and she was already snoring. She smiled, just watching her for a second. How did she manage to be so beautiful even when she was passed out and snoring? She felt her smile fade, realizing that she had never looked at anybody the way she was looking at Jackie. She had never thought about anybody the way she thought about Jackie. She felt panic creep into her chest as she realized that even when she was fucking Jeff, she was licking Jackie's lipstick off of him and thinking about what she looked like in Shauna's position. Fuck. All of a sudden, her life became a lot more clear. She felt angry and frustrated knowing how dumb she had been and knowing that again, the one thing she wanted was the one thing she was never going to get, but mostly she felt sad.

She sighed and got into bed behind her, holding her tight. It was fucking insane how much better she felt the second she felt Jackie's skin under hers. She reached her hand under her shirt and grabbed softly at the skin. She knew what it was and she felt kind of awful about it, but at this point it wasn't anything they hadn't done before. She dragged her fingers over the skin and breathed in Jackie's scent. She wanted to cry. She realized that she wanted so much more of the girl than she was ever going to have. Shauna reached as high on Jackie's stomach as she could before running into the curvature of her tits. She wasn;t wearing a bra. Obviously it was probably wet, so she had to take it off, but it was still a shock. Shauna sighed, knowing it was dangerous but not really caring. It was like her body *needed* more of her. She needed to touch her in ways she never had, and she needed to hear her react to it. She refocused, trying to calm herself down and maybe ease her need for more contact. She slung her leg over Jackie's, holding her tighter than she ever had before and closed her eyes, trying to ignore how badly she wanted Jackie to want her like this.

She really tried going to sleep, but the feeling of Jackie underneath her wasn't making that very easy. Shauna found her hand moving up higher and higher, moving to sit beside Jackie's tit and not below it. It was new skin. Shauna just needed more. The position was mostly safe anyway, the only thing that was borderline was her thumb that was now VERY close to crossing the line. Shauna held her breath, waiting for Jackie's reaction or to see if she'd wake

up. She just watched the back of her head, waiting for any indication either one way or the other when Jackie ground her hips back into Shauna's crotch. The breath she had been holding escaped her and she made a very clear hum right into Jackie's ear. Fuck.

Before she could even think about what it meant, her arm tightened around Jackie's chest and held her even closer. Anything more and she probably wouldn't be able to breathe. Jackie gasped at the feeling of it and Shauna thought for sure she'd jump out of her arms and find any excuse to go home, but she didn't. She reached back and grabbed harshly at Shauna's hip. Shauna focused on her breathing, trying her best not to moan into Jackie's ear again. She squeezed Jackie's thigh between her own and the added pressure was enough to absolutely soak her underwear. She grabbed harder at Jackie's ribs, trying to match the pressure Jackie had on her hip. It felt like she was pulling at it, trying to get Shauna to grind into her again. Jackie's head fell back into Shauna and exposed her neck. More than anything Shauna just wanted to bite it and kiss it. She wanted to leave her own marks on her. Jackie was practically panting and Shauna wasn't doing much better. She realized that she was one wrong move away from crossing a line she couldn't come back from. Acting against every instinct in her body, she moved her hand back down to Jackie's stomach and she relaxed her leg muscles, removing the pressure she had loved so much. Yeah, now she really wanted to cry. Why was she such a fucking mess? What could possess her to want to sleep with both sides of her high school's most popular couple? Why did it have to be fucking *Jackie*. Probably the only girl she could never truly have. Even if Jackie was gay, which Shauna knew she wasn't… she'd never want to risk their friendship. It would be a disaster anyway. Shauna knew that she'd make a much better friend than a partner, which was really saying a lot considering how fucking awful she had been to Jackie lately.

Shauna laid there for a half hour or so, letting Jackie fall back asleep before gently getting out of bed. She needed her journal… badly.

I thought that I couldn't get worse. I thought that what I've been doing was the worst of the worst… Now I know that I have really reached a new low. Why does Jackie have this fucking power over me? I can't fucking stand it. I can't fucking stand how terrible of a person she makes me. Nobody else fucks with my head like this, nobody else can get me so pissed off or upset or frustrated so fast. Now on top of having to deal with every other fucked up thing I've done, I also have to deal with the fact that I found a NEW WAY to completely fuck up our friendship and effectively fuck myself over. ACTUALLY FUCK ALL OF THIS. At least when she realizes what a sick fuck I am I can just move to Brown, 4 hours away from Rutgers instead of looking at her disappointment every day of the next four years.

She sighed. Maybe she should start locking her journal, because she sounded like a fucking psychopath. Shauna spent the next hour staring at her words and the wall. She was gay? She orgasmed every time she was with Jeff, though. So… bi? She had really fucked herself over. Like really, really fucked herself. She turned back to her journal.

How the fuck do I find out that I'm gay now? I've been in locker rooms with other girls for my whole life. I've surrounded myself with gay people. Obviously Tai and Van don't know that I know… but like what other explanation was there for the way they looked at each other? I saw that and I knew what being gay was. Half the musicians I listen to are gay… how do I not realize until the actual worst possible moment of my

life. This realization couldn't have popped up BEFORE I fucked Jeff? Sometimes it feels like my brain fucking hates me. It had to have had this information my whole life. Why now? Why the fuck now?

The front door opened and the smell of food travelled up the stairs. Jackie turned over on her back and woke up to the realization that Shauna had moved. She stretched her arms above her head and her shirt— no, Shauna's shirt… pulled up to expose the skin that Shauna had her hands wrapped around not long ago. She felt a pull at the bottom of her stomach and realized how often she was aroused by the way Jackie looked. She had been so fucking pervy this entire time and didn't even know. Maybe she was the dumb one, not her brain. Jackie opened her eyes and smiled at her, not helping her situation.

"Hey, you hungry?" Shauna smiled at her as her muscles relaxed back onto Shauna's bed.

"*Fuck* yes. Jeff's mom made us dinner last night and that shit was BLAND," Jackie said with a laugh. Ouch. She grinds herself into Shauna and breathes like *that* at her touch and then immediately mentions Jeff. She was sending Shauna a message. What they did was never going to mean anything. Jeff was her boyfriend. She was going to lose her virginity to Jeff and go to college and find his clone to marry and have kids with, but maybe there could be something physical between them. Maybe that would be enough for Shauna. Maybe she could live with that. She opened her journal back up, jotting down her thoughts before she did or said something she would regret.

Noted. In other words: *I might touch you and grab you like I want you, but I don't. I want my boyfriend.* Ouch.

"Girls! Dinner's ready." Deb yelled from downstairs. Shauna liked that she always assumed Jackie was there. It felt like that made her really part of the family. More than anything, Shauna just wanted her to be part of the family.

Shauna laughed, "She says that like she made it."

"Close enough for me," Jackie laughed too, sitting on the edge of Shauna's bed just looking at her. Shauna smiled and offered her hands to help Jackie up. She grinned and took them. The feeling of it sent a shock down Shauna's spine. Fuck. She really did want her. This was really going to suck.

Chapter 6

That night, Jackie barely looked up from her magazine when she mentioned Randy's party. She said it like it was an assumption that they were going. Couldn't they just stay in? Just once?

"Jackie, I don't want to go to Randy's house, he's going to try to make a move on me," Shauna protested. Jackie looked at her like she knew that. Of course, that's why she wanted Shauna to go. Find her a boyfriend no matter how heinous he might be and maybe Shauna would stop trying to touch her. Fuck.

"You probably won't even talk to Randy, the whole school's gonna be there!" Shauna glared at her. She didn't respond. They both knew that wasn't true. She wasn't sure why Jackie was even tip toeing around this. They both knew what it was. Jackie rolled her eyes and continued, "Okay, well you can just hang out with me the whole night." Shauna laughed. Bullshit. Shauna hadn't actually hung out with Jackie at a party since like middle school. Did she not even notice that? Did she not even care enough to see how miserable Shauna was at these parties?

Shauna was upset. She needed Jackie to understand what their dynamic had been for the last four years. If she truly was clueless then she wasn't going to have that excuse anymore, "Do you even fucking believe that? You always say that and then you ditch me 30 seconds through the door."

Jakcie's face contorted in a way that Shauna was not a fan of. It made her sick to her stomach to see the girl looking at her like she was just slapped in the face. Shauna waited for it to go back to normal like it always did. She waited for Jackie to just move past it like she always did, but she didn't.

"Fuck that Shauna, you'll probably just end up smoking pot with your new bestie Nat anyway." That is fucking incredible actually. Shauna laughed, truly caught off guard by how insane that statement was. Jackie could do whatever she wanted at these parties, she could ditch Shauna for Jeff or Mari or whoever the fuck she felt like, but Shauna leaves her assigned corner ONE TIME and Jackie wants to throw it back in her face like she did something wrong? *Fuck* that.

"God fucking forbid I ever talk to someone who isn't you. You get to be Ms. Social Butterfly and leave the party to give Jeff a blowjob and talk to all the popular girls, but me? I get to stand anywhere between 3-15 feet away from you and just watch you makeout with your boyfriend all night until you decide we can leave." Shauna glared at her, trying not to care that Jackie's eyes were filled with tears. Shauna had been feeling this for years and Jackie wanted to cry the second she actually talked about it out loud? And on top of it all, Jackie could only ever talk about fucking Jeff. She wanted to sleep with him and she wanted to talk about it Every. Fucking. Day. Jackie had nothing to say, so Shauna continued, "I thought you'd like the alone time with Jeff anyway, aren't you planning on fucking him tonight?" Shauna said it and turned away, not wanting Jackie to see how awful the thought of that really made her feel. She knew how evil it was that in her mind, Shauna could fuck him

and Jackie couldn't. She knew that she was awful, but she didn't care anymore. She might have fucked up, but it was because of how badly she wanted Jackie. She knew she wasn't going to get her anyway, so what was the point?

"What? No!" Jackie said it rushed and panicked. Shauna's head shot back up. No? Shauna stared at her. "My first time is not going to be drunk at fucking Randy's house. I already told my mom I was staying over here." Shauna rolled her eyes. She really let herself think that it was because Jackie didn't want to. For just a second she thought that Jackie was going to tell her she didn't want to fuck him. She's a fucking moron. And now she's again, making Shauna's plans for her. Assuming Shauna would go along with whatever she wanted to do, which of course she would… but it was still annoying.

"Of course you did." Shauna looked away again. Why was she upset? Didn't she want Jackie to stay? Didn't she want her to say she didn't want to fuck Jeff tonight? What was her fucking problem?

She heard Jackie throw her arms up and fall back down, slapping her sides in frustration and she looked back up at her. She genuinely looked like she was either going to cry or start screaming at her. "Well fuck Shauna, my bad for assuming you'd want to spend time with me. I'll call her right fucking now and tell her I changed my mind."

Shauna sighed, realizing that this was entirely her fault. She didn't want to see Jackie upset. Regardless how hurt she was or how hard she tried to convince herself she wanted to hurt Jackie, she didn't. "I'm going to the fucking party Jackie, relax. You can stay, obviously." Jackie took a deep breath and sat back down on the bed.

"Good." They sat in silence, staring at the wall. This was so stupid. What the fuck did they even just fight about? Shauna knew the whole time she was going to go to the party. Why would she start this whole fight? Why did she feed off of the conflict? Jackie started to laugh, seemingly thinking the same thing. This was all very dumb. Shauna laughed with her, trying to put it all in the past. She was going to be better than this. She was really going to try.

They spent the next night getting ready together. Shauna made them dinner and they ate with her mom, who told them to be safe and kissed them both on the forehead before leaving for work. Shauna broke into her mom's box wine and when Jeff honked in the driveway they were already stumbling. They walked into Randy's front yard and passed Tai and Van, clutching each other and giggling. They really were cute. Shauna smiled at them and then looked at Jackie. She needed a drink.

The three of them beelined for the kitchen. Jeff grabbed a beer and shot Shauna a grin when he noticed how much vodka she put in her drink. She fought the urge to roll her eyes. Jackie grabbed her attention just in time, "I'm keeping up with you tonight Shipman, give me your worst," she said with a wink. Shauna smiled at her. If she wanted her worst then she was gonna get her worst. She dumped the same 4 shots into Jackie's cup and handed it off. Shauna waited patiently for Jackie to grab Jeff's hand and disappear into the basement or the living room, but she grabbed Shauna's instead, pulling her as close as they could get to the speakers. The feeling was pure shock. She let Jackie grab both of her hands and force her arms to move with the music. It didn't take long for Shauna to figure out she actually could smile at one of these things. When they needed a refill, they decided to play beer pong

downstairs with a couple of the girls on the softball team. They won, obviously, and it felt like Jackie's eyes never left Shauna. She had never felt like this before. She had never felt like she had ever had Jackie's complete undivided attention. She had never felt like she was deliberately being picked over Jeff or Mari, who had tried to step in as Jackie's partner but was rejected. Shauna wasn't sure if it was that or the alcohol but her face was actually starting to hurt. She smiled more in the first hour at this party than she had at any of them in the last four years.

One drink later they found themselves staring at each other and laughing like idiots. Jackie leaned in and whispered in Shauna's ear, "Wanna go smoke?"

Shauna smiled and raised her eyebrows. Jackie *never* smoked. Not in a very long time anyway. "*You* wanna go smoke?" Shauna said, amused by this sudden desire for an excuse to be alone and hidden in the trees together. Maybe she was drunk or just being presumptuous but she *could not* have been making all of this up out of nothing. There *had to* have been something there.

Jackie rolled her eyes, not able to wipe the smile off of her lips… lips which Shauna was definitely staring at now, "*You* wanna go smoke, and I wanna do what you wanna do." Shauna's jaw dropped and she laughed. She couldn't help it, she was shocked. Obviously they ran outside to go find Nat. Shauna found her talking to… Travis?

"Nat?"

Nat looked at her and smiled and then looked at Jackie standing behind her and stopped. Shauna laughed. "What do you need, Shipman?"

"We thought you might wanna smoke with us?"

Nat rolled her eyes and spoke too quietly for Jackie to have heard, "With you? Sure. But I'm gonna pass on this one." She handed Shauna a pre roll and a lighter and Shauna nodded, understanding that she would probably rather just talk to Coach Martinez's kid. Typically, Shauna wouldn't let anybody even try to shine a bad light on Jackie, but when it came to Nat… she probably had it coming. Jackie had always been too harsh on the girl and anytime Shauna tried to bring it up they ended up fighting about it. At first, Shauna didn't really get it, but over the years she realized that Jackie puts a lot of effort into being everything Nat is not. They really were a lot more similar than either of them knew, Jackie just tried to hide it more. Shauna always thought that Jackie probably hated the pieces of herself she saw Nat displaying so honestly, and she could kind of understand that. She learned to just let it be.

"Thank you." Nat nodded and basically shooed her away. Shauna grabbed Jackie's arm and led her a few trees back into the woods. She held the pre roll up to her lips and lit it, trying to focus on repeating the steps Nat had tried to teach her over the years. She blew out, getting it to catch and then drew a long breath in, looking up at Jackie as she did it. She looked absolutely perfect in the dim lighting with the trees surrounding her like her own personal backdrop. Nobody else would ever look this good drunk as fuck in the dark woods. She hit it again, trying to distract herself from Jackie's eyes and the curvature of her lips before passing it over. When she looked up she noticed Jackie's eyes trained on the same thing. Shauna grinned. Maybe she wouldn't ever want a relationship. She had made that pretty clear, Shauna thought, but she definitely looked interested in her lips right now. Shauna pulled her eyes away from the girl, looking back at the house past the treeline. She

turned back when she heard Jackie coughing. Shauna chuckled. She had found something Jackie wasn't good at. Who knew? Jackie looked somewhere between amused and embarrassed and handed the pre roll back to Shauna. She took a short drag of it before taking a step closer to Jackie and holding it up to her lips. Her fingers were so close to them it was criminal.

"Just relax. Breathe it in, Jax. Nice and slow… let it sit and then just breathe out. Nothing crazy." They locked eyes as Shauna talked her through it and Jackie started coughing again. She laughed at herself whenever she could get enough air and Shauna laughed too. This really was fun. Shauna took another drag and she watched Jackie's face drop at the sight of the joint on her lips. Shauna smiled. There was definitely something there. Jackie grabbed it from her and took two long drags, determined now to get it right. Shauna raised her eyebrows.

"Wowza Taylor, maybe slow it down. You're gonna be absolutely fried." For somebody that didn't smoke very often, two long hits might knock her completely on her ass.

Jackie laughed at her and responded, "I told you, I'm keeping up tonight."

Shauna grinned at her before letting the alcohol and the weed start to stir the pot for her. "Well any more and you're gonna go ditch me for Jeff."

Jackie's brow furrowed. She was cute when she was confused. "What? Why would getting high make me want to ditch you?"

"Well… you know." Shauna thought it was just common knowledge. Getting high makes you horny. Nat had told her that having sex while high was the best way to do it, and she definitely felt something every time she did it.

Jackie smiled at her, still looking pretty confused, "I don't know… please fill me in."

"Getting high always, like… gets you going, if you know what I mean." Shauna laughed and she watched Jackie's face get red. She was blushing! Shauna took another hit, trying to disguise how much she was enjoying her nervousness.

She responded a little too quickly, "And what does that have to do with Jeff?" She watched Jackie's face turn to panic and Shauna laughed. She was honestly elated, but she didn't want Jackie to get scared and run off, so she let her believe she had no idea what she meant by that.

"Because you want to fuck him, Jackie. The weed hit you fast as fuck," Jackie nodded, but not very convincingly as she inhaled what was left of the preroll and put it out when it started to just smell like burnt paper. Shauna just watched, enthralled at the sight of her red lipstick rubbed off on it.

"Come on Shipman, I need another drink." She turned around and took a very wobbly three steps out of the tree line. Shauna laughed.

"You're for sure gonna end up on the bathroom floor tonight." They made their way back to the kitchen, and to Shauna's surprise, successfully passed the bathroom door. Shauna grabbed two new cups because they had seemed to lose theirs and poured herself a beer before filling Jackie's in the kitchen sink with some water.

“I don’t want you too fucked up tonight, Jax, water would be good.” It was less a suggestion and more a fact. Jackie needed water. She gave her a cute little pout, drawing Shauna’s attention pretty obviously to the girl’s lips. They were so pretty. Nobody else on the planet could have better looking lips than Jackie Taylor. Shauna felt herself lose focus for a second, but then regained her composure, “Nuh uh, not gonna work. Water.”

Jackie rolled her eyes and dropped the act, “Ugh, fine.” She finished it probably a little too fast and looked up at Shauna. “What time is it?” Shauna looked around. Everybody had pretty much left. Where the fuck had they been? She jumped at the sound of Jeff’s voice. She had kind of forgotten he existed.

“Like 3 am. Where have you two been all night?” The question was clearly for Jackie to answer, but Jeff’s eyes were on Shauna. Shauna looked him square in the face. She knew what he wanted. It had been a while since they had done anything, and she knew this would happen. She tried to convey her disinterest with her eyes, but it couldn’t have been too convincing. Shauna had been thinking about Jackie’s lipstick on his neck and how easily she came with the scent of her perfume. She definitely had to have looked like she was into something. She was distracted from her thoughts by the sight of Jackie’s hand on his chest. Shauna felt that now very familiar gut punch and looked down at her drink, deciding now was probably a good time to finish it.

“We went out and smoked for a while. I didn’t realize how late it was. Are you ready to head out?” Jackie said to him. He grabbed her chin and Shauna felt sick. He pulled her face into his and Shauna watched those lips she had been staring at all night suddenly on his. She crumpled her cup and threw it probably a little too hard into the trash bag in the kitchen.

“Yeah baby,” Jeff’s voice practically yelled in Shauna’s face. Baby. His baby, obviously. Fuck this. “We can head out. Are you staying at Shauna’s?” The question sounded a little bitter to Shauna. It was less out of curiosity and the need for information as their DD and more like *so am I not getting to fuck either of you tonight?* It probably wasn’t, but that was the way her brain worked. Shauna braced herself for Jackie’s response, knowing pretty certainly tonight would be the night.

“Yeah you can just drop us there.” Shauna’s head snapped up and she looked hard at Jackie. She wasn’t going to fuck him. She was relieved until she saw the look on Jeff’s face. He was disappointed, not much of a surprise. Shauna looked at the other baseball guys littered in the living room, trying her best to not meet his eyes. Jackie grabbed her arm and they walked together to his truck. When they got to Shauna’s house she again had to watch the two of them kiss. It started out kind of light and soft, but Jackie deepened it. She grabbed the back of his neck and Shauna had to watch as his hands grabbed her ass. She suddenly felt very nauseous. If it lasted any longer she might actually throw up. She cleared her throat, needing it to end ASAP. Jackie snapped out of it with a giggle and ran up to the front door. Shauna tried to focus her thoughts on unlocking her door and not displaying how upset she was on her face. Jackie was apparently unfazed.

“Shhhhh, your mom’s asleep,” Jackie said, apparently much louder than she thought.

Shauna shot back, “No she’s not Jackie. She’s at work. Will be until 10 tomorrow.” Jackie didn’t even pick up on her bitter tone.

“Oh, okay! I didn’t bring any clothes. I’m gonna go steal some, okay?”

Shauna laughed, a little grateful that Jackie wasn't paying enough attention to be upset. "Yeah, Jax," she said a little softer, "Whatever you need." Jackie ran up the stairs and Shauna took a deep breath. She was obviously upset that Jackie had so brazenly claimed Jeff, but at least Shauna was going to be the one holding her tonight. At least she knew Jackie wasn't fucking him tonight. She could accept that… probably. She walked slowly to the kitchen, trying to stop her head from spinning. She filled two glasses with water, downing and refilling one of them and then grabbed a bottle of tylenol out of the medicine cabinet, swallowing two pills before carrying it all up the stairs. She tripped over the first step, spilling a couple drops of water and laughed at herself. She was so high. She laughed harder and finally made it all the way upstairs. She changed out of her party clothes and into a pair of old pajama shorts and the biggest hoodie she could find before setting the pills and water down on the little table next to Jackie's side of the bed. She started to climb into bed, hearing Jackie's footsteps behind her as she did. When she looked up at her she felt her mouth start to salivate. One, she was wearing *Shauna's* clothes, two, she was wearing Shauna's *little tiny tank top* and three, she had Shauna's practice shorts on too. Shauna looked her up and down before swallowing her drool and looking away.

"Oh, hey. I grabbed you some water and tylenol. Probably a good idea to try to down most of it before you pass out."

"Thanks, Shipman. You're sweet." Shauna tried not to blush as she stared intently at the ceiling. Her attention was drawn right back by Jackie turning around and free falling backwards onto the bed. She was definitely high too. They laughed and Jackie hiccuped.

"Oh fuck, I'm wayyyy more drunk than I thought I was."

Shauna laughed. "I don't think I even felt it until we were in the car, honestly." Jackie turned on her side, propping her head up with her hand to look at her. Shauna followed suit and watched as Jackie traced her features with her eyes. All Shauna could think about was the way she kissed Jeff before coming inside. If Shauna hadn't interrupted they might still be out there. She looked down at her exposed neck and collarbones and then further down to where the tank top cut off and revealed her abs. *Fuck.*

"You look cozy," Shauna said, trying to find some kind of lame excuse for why she was looking at her like that.

Jackie scrunched her nose and shrugged, "I don't know… could probably be cozier."

Shauna giggled and stared at her for a second before responding, "Oh well let's fix that then." She grabbed three different blankets she kept on her bed and started to tuck Jackie in.

"Wait! Wait!" She laughed and turned around, giving Shauna an excellent view of the way her back looked in the tank top and the way her ass looked in the shorts. The weed was definitely hitting. Jesus christ this was going to be a long night. Shauna wasted no time fitting in snugly behind her. She covered them both in the blankets and nuzzled her face into the side of Jackie's neck. The smell of her perfume driving her fucking crazy. She couldn't tell if she had gotten off with Jeff because of the scent, or if now she had Pavloved herself with Jackie's perfume. Either way, she was soaked. It was borderline uncomfortable.

Shauna sighed, "You looked really beautiful tonight, Jax. I bet Jeff was losing his mind." Shauna sure was.

Jackie laughed softly, “Yeah, I bet he was.” Shauna tried not to let herself feel so disappointed. It felt like another sign. Jackie wanted him. She might’ve been curious about Shauna, sure, but she didn’t want her. Not like that.

“Goodnight,” Shauna whispered, pulling Jackie in tighter to her and moving her hand to her stomach, trying to satisfy her need for touch with the now familiar skin. It wasn’t enough, and Shauna moved her leg overtop of Jackie’s to get as close as humanly possible. Jackie smiled and sighed, pushing back to try to get closer herself. Jackie’s hand reached back to Shauna’s thigh, moving up and down. She reached the line of her shorts and slowly moved her fingertips between her leg and fabric, moving around the internal seam. Shauna’s breath hitched and she started to move her fingers in circles on Jackie’s abs. She felt the ridges of the muscle, playing with the lines and creases of the definition. Shauna grabbed at it softly, wanting more than anything to just hold it in her hand. Jackie continued to tease her fingers higher and higher, and Shauna couldn’t even tell if she was doing it intentionally but it was driving her fucking crazy. Her fingers twitched at the feeling of Jackie’s hands that close to her upper thighs. They were itching for more. She suppressed a whine at the movement of Jackie’s fingers. She wanted her to reach higher. She wanted Jackie to touch her… like *really* touch her. Shauna felt up to Jackie’s ribs, moving in tune with the natural curve of her body up higher and higher until she reached— her bra. It wasn’t until Shauna felt it that she realized how close to Jackie’s tits she had been getting recently. She deliberated. Should she just go back to her stomach? Should she just stop? Jackie’s hand wrapped around the muscle on the back of Shauna’s thigh and dug into it. Was she into this? Was that her telling her she’d be okay with it? Shauna let her fingernails trace the band of the bra, teasingly fitting between her and the fabric as she debated. Jackie pushed her head back into Shauna and she started to pant. Shauna moaned silently and felt the muscles in her pussy clench at the sound of it. She was so turned on. She had never fucking felt like this with Jeff. She had never wanted anything so badly in her entire life. Any restraint Shauna felt somewhat capable of showing immediately left her system. Jackie’s fingernails dug into Shauna’s leg and she grunted at the pain that came with it. She hoped that she’d be able to see the bruises they left tomorrow. It might not be emotional, it might not be a relationship, but Shauna didn’t care. She needed more. She needed to be touched and tasted. She needed to feel Jackie underneath her. She stopped debating.

“Fuck it.” Shauna immediately pushed her fingers underneath the fabric of the bra, needing it as far from Jackie’s body as she could possibly get it. Jackie moaned and Shauna knew the sound would never leave her mind. She moaned in response to it and grabbed harshly at her tits, needing to feel every inch of skin, needing to hear every breathy reaction. Shauna was now obsessed with it. If there was something she hadn’t touched, she searched for it. She wanted it all committed to memory, just in case they never did this again. Jackie’s hand ran up higher on Shauna’s leg, grabbing hard at her ass and holding her closer to Jackie than she thought was even possible. Shauna moaned into Jackie’s ear at the friction. Jackie pushed again, throwing her head back and moaning at Shauna’s response. She felt like she was losing control of the situation. She had to do something. Shauna grasped Jackie’s nipple and pulled at it gently. Jackie gasped loudly and ground her ass into Shauna’s legs. ‘Oh my fucking god, Jax,’ Shauna moaned. She couldn’t stop herself if she tried. She needed Jackie to never stop making those noises. She needed Jackie to let her do this all night and all day tomorrow. She wanted to hear every possible combination of moans and movements. She needed it like an addict. She pulled Jackie’s tank top and bra as high up as they would go,

completely exposing her tits for whatever she wanted them for. She trailed Jackie's bare skin down to her hip and controlled her movements, pushing Jackie's ass into herself. The new angle let Jackie grind directly on Shauna's clit and she let out a little surprised squeal. She reached around with her other hand and continued to play with Jackie's tits, pinching and pulling softly at her nipples and the skin that surrounded them. Jackie reached underneath Shauna's shorts and the underwear she had underneath and grabbed at the bare skin of her ass. She pushed Shauna into herself and moaned loudly. Since Jackie was apparently VERY capable of making Shauna feel good all on her own, Shauna allowed her hand to continue roaming her body. She let it run down Jackie's thighs and back up. Jackie whined and spread her legs, yet another thing Shauna decided to commit to memory. Shauna grinned at her and moved her hand to her inner thighs, mesmerized by the way Jackie squirmed as she got closer. Shauna pulled Jackie's shorts to one side and was met with nothing but wetness. She took her panties off? Shauna groaned involuntarily, "*Fucking* hell…" Jackie gasped as Shauna started to run her fingers through her. She was so fucking wet. All for Shauna. It was all for her.

She sighed and moved up and down through Jackie's folds, just watching her react to the touch. Jackie huffed and held Shauna in place with her ass before grinding her hips down hard on Shauna's fingers. Shauna felt the way it suctioned to her and she moaned again. "Oh fuck yes," Jackie whispered. Shauna started to push her fingers in and out, relishing the way Jackie was reacting to her touch. Shauna was starting to build a little confidence in it. She had never done this before, but clearly Jackie was enjoying it. She grabbed her tit and started massaging it as she curled her fingers up inside of Jackie, pushing them deeper inside her. Jackie gasped and moaned, pushing her hips down onto them. Shauna was in awe of her. Jackie reached back and dug her hand between Shauna's thighs. She felt her hips buck at the touch and Jackie started shaking beneath her. Shauna felt Jackie's pussy contracting on her fingers and moaned loudly. She held her as closely as she could and kissed the back of her neck as she came.

Jackie sprung up and practically jumped between her legs, pushing them apart. Jackie looked up at her and Shauna felt her eyes roll back. She could've came right there. Just looking at Jackie between her legs would've been enough. She *needed* Jackie to touch her. She needed to be fucked. Jackie grinned at her and pulled her shorts and underwear to the side, wasting no time in burying two fingers deep inside of Shauna. She wasn't sure what she was expecting. Fingers obviously weren't going to feel the same as a penis, and Shauna had her doubts, but *god* the way they pushed deeper and deeper, the intentionality of Jackie's touch, the way she could press into spots that Jeff could never hit and do it SO easily… it was better. It was so much better. Jackie's free hand moved Shauna's hoodie completely off of her chest. She looked at Shauna with this insanely sexy look in her eyes. She looked like she wanted to consume every part of her body. She leaned down and took Shauna's nipple in her mouth, something that sent a shockwave through her entire system, all the way down her spine. The combined stimulation made every muscle Shauna had tense and flex. She reached down and tangled her hand in her soft blonde curls. She felt Jackie go from sucking gently on her nipple to adding pressure with her tongue, moving in circles in time with the fingers that were pumping in and out of her. Shauna had never in her life felt anything like this, and she never wanted it to end.

"Oh fuck. Please don't stop. That feels so fucking good." Shauna felt the vibrations of Jackie's moan on her tits and she picked up the pace with her fingers. Shauna felt it start to

build in her abdomen, her muscles getting tighter and tighter as Jackie pushed harder and deeper inside of her. Shauna practically screamed as she came, holding Jackie in place by her hair, not letting her move even an inch until she had completely come down from her high.

She felt her head start to spin again and laughed in shock at what she just experienced, "That was… wow." Jackie smiled at her and Shauna grabbed her, pulling her up into her arms. Jackie turned over and passed out almost immediately on Shauna's chest. Shauna tucked herself into her hair and fell asleep to the feeling of her skin on her own.

Chapter 7

"Shauna, babe. Wakey wakey!" Jackie said it like waking up was a good thing. Shauna laid there with her eyes closed and groaned before finally turning over to look at her clock.

"Jackie what the fuck it's 9 in the morning." She looked up at her as she laughed and moved to set a cup of coffee down. Everything they had done the last night came rushing back to her. Shauna closed her eyes and rubbed her face, taking her time to process where Jackie wouldn't be able to see her reaction to it. The way she looked between Shauna's legs, the noises she made as she came. Fuck.

"I have coffee though…" Jackie held the mug she had brought up for Shauna under her nose and she opened her eyes to look at her again. Shauna knew she wasn't going to want to talk about it. They were beyond fucked up and it was just physical… at least to Jackie it was. Shauna grabbed the mug and thanked her.

"What are we doing today?" Shauna took a sip and looked up at her. She seemed conflicted.

"Well, Jeff was supposed to take me to the movies…" She sounded unsure, but Shauna had pretty much expected this. Obviously, they fucked last night so her first move would be to reestablish that she was with Jeff. Actually, she said she was going to fuck him this weekend. That's what she was mentioning… Ouch. Apparently it meant nothing. Noted.

"Oh yeah, I forgot about your plans." Shauna took another sip, avoiding Jackie's gaze. She was a little proud of the way she was able to bury how painful this conversation was. "You still thinking about fucking him today?" She said it so casually that Jackie would never be able to tell that she felt like she had to have had some internal bleeding going on or something.

Jackie was staring at her as she spoke, and Shauna couldn't meet her eyes, trying to casually find anything else. She settled mostly on her coffee and the window. "I don't know… should I?" Well if it was up to Shauna, then no. I mean she knew that. Didn't she? Shauna looked up at her. She was actually looking for Shauna's response.

"I mean you said you wanted to right?" Jackie's face fell a little bit. So… she wanted Shauna to know that she was with Jeff, but she didn't exactly want to hang out with him. Shauna decided to give her an out, "But if you don't… I was kind of thinking about heading to the field and maybe shooting around a bit."

"Actually, that sounds kinda fun." It did, honestly. Jackie went downstairs to call Jeff and Shauna opened her journal.

It's obviously not great… not ideal… I'm hurting myself at every turn with this shit. Every mention of Jeff makes me want to throw up. Every time she looks at him I remember that I'm not going to have that. She can love him, but not me. Not like that. It fucking HURTS, but I realized how badly I've wanted this. I don't know I could have lived without realizing what this was. She's going to keep hurting me, and I'm going to

keep hurting myself, but I think it's worth it. It'll blow up, but it's probably going to anyway, right? Maybe I deserve to be hurt like this. Maybe this is my punishment. I can touch her and fuck her but I'll never get to be with her. Might be worse than never knowing at all.

Jackie walked back into the room and started to rummage through Shauna's dresser drawers. Shauna shut her journal and turned around, "Looking for something?"

"Stealing a shirt," she said without looking up. Shauna was a little disappointed. She was kind of hoping that Jackie would just wear that tank top forever.

Shauna got up and walked over to her. "So you're gonna make me get dressed?"

She threw her hands up, seeming a little frustrated, "I thought you wanted to go to the field."

Shauna laughed, "You thought I wanted to go at 9 am?" Jackie crossed her arms and looked at her like, *yeah duh. I want to go at 9 am so we're going at 9 am.* "Okay. Guess I'm going at 9 am." Jackie smiled at her and picked one of Shauna's shirts to throw on over her tank top. Shauna tried not to frown too hard at her now hidden abs.

"Drink the rest of your coffee, Shipman. It'll be good for you." Yeah they were definitely acting as if nothing happened. Shauna took a deep breath and finished her coffee, willing herself to try to remember the really sweet, funny, kind Jackie from last night instead of the one now that was telling her what her plans were for the day. Did her call with Jeff piss her off or something? Was she mad at Shauna now because she cancelled her plans? Shauna grabbed a sports bra and an old practice shirt to wear and walked into the bathroom to change. The rest of the day was pretty much like they hadn't done anything at all. Jackie continued to talk about Jeff pretty much constantly, and Shauna took out her anger about that on the back of the net. When she dropped Jackie off, she thought about saying something. She thought about telling Jackie that it was okay if she wanted to do it again. She thought about telling her that it didn't have to mean anything. It could just be drunken fun and she wouldn't tell Jeff. She didn't though, too terrified that she would tell Shauna it would never happen again. When she said goodbye, part of her really thought Jackie was gonna tell her that she loved her back, but the more overwhelming part of her brain knew exactly what was going to happen. Jackie opened the car door and smiled at her.

"I'll call when I get home okay? I love you."

Jackie reached back through the car and grabbed her hand. "Talk to you later, Shipman." Shauna tried not to look too disappointed, faking a smile and nodding her head. When Shauna got home she noticed her mom's car in the driveway. She walked in hoping that she had gotten there early enough to catch her and say hi, but she was already asleep with her door shut. Shauna took a deep breath and put in her Liz Phair cd. She tried to do some homework, then she tried to read, she tried to sleep. Really, she tried everything that wasn't thinking about Jackie and the predicament she had gotten herself into.

Did I really just fuck Jeff because I was trying to get to her? Do I even like guys? I thought I did, but if I only orgasmed thinking about her… what the fuck does that mean? I want it again. I want more. I want so much more of her. Probably more than

I'll ever get. What happens if she finds out? She's going to hate me forever and I'm going to deserve every second of it. Why the fuck did I do that?

Shauna took more of her mom's melatonin and put herself to sleep before entering too terrible of a thought spiral. They went a couple days without spending much time together. Shauna knew she was probably avoiding it. Jackie didn't want to talk about it, and she was worried that if they were alone together they'd have to, or worse… they'd do it again. Finally, she came over to do homework. Jackie probably needed help with her final papers. Seemed like the only reasonable solution. They decided it would be good to just grind it out and finish every assignment they had left. As seniors, they didn't have very many exams, but they both had a few assignments and papers to finish up and then they'd be done.

Jackie turned on MTV and got comfortable on the couch. Shauna sat on the opposite side trying to show Jackie she wasn't going to try to jump her bones, but gradually their legs got closer and closer. Eventually, they were touching, backs leaning against either arm of the couch and facing each other as they worked on some of it. Shauna did everything she could to avoid looking up at her, trying to offset the overwhelming feeling that her foot on Jackie's thigh was giving her. She had her textbook open and was doing her final reading assignment, but Jackie's legs were *right* there. They were tanned and lean, and Shauna couldn't keep her eyes off of them. She tried very hard to focus on the textbook, but she just wanted more touch. It was killing her being so close yet so far away. Shauna reached out and started to massage the foot that Jackie had rested on her stomach. It wasn't out of the ordinary, it wasn't something that would be weird, so she figured it didn't have to be a thing. Jackie wouldn't see it inherently as a thing. Shauna found that this actually made it harder to do her homework, but she didn't care anymore. She worked her way up to her ankles and then her calf. Jackie took a deep breath and Shauna sunk her hands deeper into the muscle. Jackie moaned and Shauna stared *hard* at her textbook. That moan brought her right back to her bed that night. Shauna slowly looked up, trying not to give anything away but needing to see the look on her face. Jackie had her head thrown back and her mouth slightly open. Shauna's jaw dropped.

"That feels nice." Shauna's head raced with every image she had forced herself to memorize that night. Jesus Christ.

She looked back at her textbook, making it look like the nothing that Jackie probably wanted it to be. "Yeah you're pretty tight." She knew what it sounded like the second it was out of her mouth, and her face went hot as soon as she realized. She felt Jackie looking at her and she refused to look back. Shauna's heart was beating faster than it probably ever had before. She wanted to fuck her again. She wanted more.

"Wait, actually do you think you could do my back?" Shauna's head snapped up. What was she trying to do to her? She wanted Shauna to climb on top of her and feel the skin on her back, look at her ass and the back of her neck, and not fuck her? "If you're being productive don't worry about it but it's been killing me all day." Shauna looked her up and down, thinking about having her underneath her again and also trying to figure out what she was trying to get out of this. Jackie Taylor, master complainer has had a sore back *all day* and hasn't mentioned it once? Shauna wasn't buying it. Obviously she could never turn it down though.

"Yeah of course. All you had to do was ask." Shauna licked her lips, her mouth suddenly feeling very dry. "Lay down." It came out more demanding than she had intended and it almost looked like Jackie was blushing as she scrambled to listen. Shauna took a deep breath and shut her textbook. She climbed onto the backs of Jackie's upper thighs and resisted the urge to start with her ass. Shauna slowly moved her hands under Jackie's sweatshirt. Her skin was cold, and Shauna ran her hands up and down the skin to warm it up. Every time she came across the back of her bra strap, she fought the urge to just unclasp it. She moved her hands down to Jackie's lower back and applied gentle pressure with her knuckles. Jackie let out a quiet hum and Shauna knew she wasn't going to be able to let this just be a massage. Not when she was making sounds like that. She ran her hands back up to Jackie's shoulders, pulling at the muscles and feeling a suspiciously absent number of knots. Jackie continued to make little noises that were driving Shauna crazy. She massaged all the way down her shoulder blades and back to her lower back. She put more of her weight into it and moved down to her hips. Shauna couldn't stop herself from squeezing them gently and rubbing her thumbs in circles at the bottom of her spine.

Jackie let out a little sigh and then a moan, and Shauna didn't stand a chance. She took a shaky breath and looked at her back. She let her eyes travel up to the back of her neck and her perfectly brushed hair. Something just came over her. She just needed it so badly. It was like she was in a trance. She reached up and grabbed the back of Jackie's neck, pushing her gently into the couch. Jackie moaned and Shauna watched her hips arch up at her. She smiled at the sight of it. Jackie just looked so… desperate, and wanting. It was so sexy. Shauna grabbed her ass and pushed her hips back down. Jackie inhaled sharply and let out a grunt.

"Oh fuck, Shauna." Shauna took that as an invitation to continue and grabbed her ass, massaging the muscle. She grinned at the reaction she was getting. She could see that Jackie was getting more and more needy. She squirmed and whined at Shauna's touch.

"You said you were sore." Shauna was moving methodically lower and lower on her ass, feeling every inch of it, loving the feeling of Jackie pinned below her. She slipped her hands underneath her shorts and Jackie groaned.

"Yep. I am. So sore." Shauna's eyes rolled back in her head and she grabbed the bare skin of her hip, sliding her hand under the side of her underwear. She pulled Jackie's ass back up in the air. She liked her like that. She liked the way Jackie looked completely at her disposal. She just sat there and admired her. Jackie started turning her head, but Shauna didn't want to give her any level of control. She pushed her face back into the cushion. Jackie let out a muffled, 'Oh fuck!' Shauna pulled Jackie's shorts and underwear to the side and just admired her. She could see how wet she was. She wanted her. Shauna gently kissed the opening of her pussy. She wanted to taste it. She wanted to taste her. Jackie jumped at the feeling and Shauna had to work to push her back down onto the couch. Once she realized what was happening, she sunk back in and pushed her hips up to give Shauna better access. Jackie kept letting out little moans and grunts as Shauna sunk her tongue into her. "Oh my fucking god," she almost whispered it and Shauna moaned into her pussy. She let her tongue run through Jackie's folds from the top to the bottom, Jackie bucked her hips and Shauna held her down by wrapping her arm around her thighs. She hadn't realized how fucking *good* Jackie would taste. She licked and sucked at it like she couldn't get enough because honestly, she couldn't. She wanted to taste every part of her and Jackie was so, so wet. Shauna felt

Jackie shift to start rubbing her clit and she picked up the pace. She loved feeling how desperate Jackie was. She loved hearing her moans and seeing how good it felt when Shauna touched her. Shauna felt her muscles start to tense and held her down, wanting to fuck her through her orgasm. Jackie started to convulse and once she had slowed down, Shauna pulled back, releasing Jackie from her hold.

She turned around looking fucking amazed. If she didn't know how badly Shauna wanted her, she did now. "Oh my god, Shauna." Jackie had her pushed down and her pants ripped off before she could even react. She moaned before her head even hit the couch cushion. She just wanted Jackie so fucking bad. Jackie reached down and rubbed her clit gently in circles. She was so wet, and Jackie was looking at her with her mouth open. Part of her was a little embarrassed at how worked up she was, but she hardly cared. She just needed to be touched. Jackie held eye contact as she pushed two fingers inside of her, slowly moving them in and out. The pace was driving Shauna crazy. She felt her legs twitching and couldn't stop herself from moaning and gasping. She tried to just relax and enjoy it, but her orgasm was building fast. It was probably a good thing Jackie was moving so slow because anything more and she was going to cum. It was like Jackie read her mind, because she leaned down and licked gently at her clit. Shauna's eyes rolled back in her head and she wrapped her legs around Jackie's face. Jackie sucked gently on it and she came right away. That was all it took for Jackie to get her off. Fuck she was so whipped.

She finally started to bring her breathing back to normal and tried to sit up when Jackie dove back in with her tongue. She looked down at Jackie who was looking up at her, watching for her reactions. "Holy shit, Jax." She smiled with her eyes and reached at Shauna's lips with the hand she had just gotten fucked with. Shauna opened her mouth as wide as it would go and Jackie's fingers pushed inside them. Shauna moaned. This was so hot, sucking on her fingers… licking herself off of them. That combined with Jackie's tongue running up and down her pussy sent her from her first orgasm into her second in under a minute. She bit down on Jackie's fingers to muffle her scream and as soon as she released them, Jackie had collapsed onto her chest. Shauna couldn't think or move or do anything… she just had to lay there in a daze for a few minutes before she could wrap her arms around Jackie and finally just pass out. She didn't need sleeping pills or journaling, just Jackie's skin on hers.

Shauna jumped at the sound of the garage opening. Her mom was home from work. Fuck. Jackie was on the same page, jumping off of Shauna and handing her her shorts that were thrown on the floor. She threw them on and practically ran to the bathroom to regroup. Jesus Christ. She cleaned herself up and plashed some water on her face. Shauna had never felt like that before. It was like she was possessed and just turned into some pussy starved version of herself. God, Jackie just looked so… sexy when she came. She looked sexy before she came. She looked sexy laying there with her ass in the air and her face pressed into the couch. Shauna fucking *loved* the way Jackie looked at her before she turned over and climbed on top of her. Fuck. Shauna took a deep breath and washed her hands before putting on a fake face and going to say hello to her mom.

This pretty much went on for the next week. Every day they would go from relatively tame, normal activities to fucking on Shauna's couch, or her kitchen counter or Jackie's bedroom which was arguably the most dangerous place to do it. It was like they couldn't take their hands off of each other, and every time they did it Shauna felt herself sink further into

this panic and depression. She kept fucking mentioning Jeff. Every time, Shauna felt herself get angrier and angrier. It was like Jackie was just using her or playing with her. She had to have known that her sleeping with anybody and looking at anybody the way she looked at Shauna when she came would make them fall in love. Shauna was starting to get angrier and more bitter as it went on. She would never stop, but it fucking killed her every time. Every time they would fuck like they couldn't get enough of each other and Shauna would tell Jackie she loved her and Jackie wouldn't say it back. Every time Jackie would look at Shauna like she was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, she would attack her body like she needed it and then turn around and talk about Jeff in his baseball pants. Jackie wouldn't kiss her, she wouldn't talk about it at all or really talk during it. It was very, very clear what Jackie wanted. Kissing her was too significant. Kissing was for Jeff, the rest of her body was for Shauna. She wanted to be fucked and then she wanted to pretend it never happened.

Shauna had tried journaling, but the problem was usually she'd journal to get it out of her system, and then act in a way that wasn't so detrimental to her mental health and the safety and well being of those around her. Shauna didn't actually do that. Her journaling ended up just amplifying things instead, which was never going to end well. She had fully realized how in love she was. She had fully realized how big of a mess she had made fucking Jeff and keeping Brown a secret. The sex was fucking amazing, but she needed more. She just wanted Jackie to tell her she loved her. She wanted her to tell her that she wanted her. Fucking ANYTHING. Jeff had been calling anytime Jackie wasn't there, which wasn't often but was still more times than it needed to be, and he was saying all of those things. She knew it was dangerous. She knew she needed to stop answering the phone, but she just couldn't. She needed the validation, and in some weird fucked up way when it came from him, it felt like Jackie was saying it.

On a Saturday morning, Jackie mentioned him again. She talked about how much she missed him, like it was Shauna's fault that she couldn't be with him. If she wanted to fuck Jeff, then at this point Shauna just wanted her to rip off the band aid. Constantly having to hear how she wanted to do it but couldn't was slowly killing her. Shauna constantly felt like she was bleeding out, and she couldn't take it anymore. Shauna did what she always did, gave Jackie a tight lipped smile and pretended to be understanding. If Shauna wasn't so ridiculously desperate for Jackie to the point where she was able to cum in like 2 minutes, sex with Jeff would have had to have been unsatisfying. She dropped Jackie off for lunch with her parents and her parent's friends, some kind of networking event that she hated and she told Jackie she loved her like she was pleading for a response. She had to have known how badly Shauna needed it, but she just smiled and waved goodbye. Shauna cried the whole way back to her house and when Jeff called, she answered.

"Shauna, she's been blowing me off for weeks. Did you tell her?" He was so fucking stupid. Why would Shauna ever mention it?

"No. I didn't tell her. She'd never speak to me again." Jeff sighed.

"Shauna, I've been thinking about you…" Shauna cried silently. Would it really have been so hard for Jackie to just say that? After a week of sleeping with Shauna every fucking day. Why couldn't she just say anything? 'I miss you. You have no idea how badly I want you.' She knew that he didn't mean it in the way he meant it when he said it to Jackie, but

Jackie wasn't available to him right now. It was hard to blame him. Who would choose Shauna over her? Shauna wouldn't even choose herself. "Can I come pick you up?" Jeff was quiet for a moment waiting for a response from Shauna that never came, but he must have taken the lack of an instant rejection as a positive. "I— I love you, Shauna." Shauna felt the tears start really running down her face now. She knew he was manipulating her. She knew that because she had asked him to say it he knew it would get her now.

"If you can't be here in 5 , don't bother." Shauna said, knowing that she would never go through with it if she had any time to think about it. It was wrong and she hated herself for it, but she already hated herself for doing the same thing. What difference would it really make? Jeff hung up the phone, probably sprinting to the car trying to turn a 7 minute drive into a 5 minute one. Shauna went to the bathroom, splashing water on her face and trying to stop the steady stream of tears from falling. Her face was puffy and it was pretty obvious Shauna had been crying, but she was sure Jeff would look past it once he had his dick out.

The second she let him put it in her she knew it was a mistake. He didn't smell like her. He didn't feel like her. When he told her that he loved her, it didn't do what she needed it to. She begged him to say every phrase that she had hoped Jackie would say to her, and every time it made her chest sink deeper and deeper into her body. By the time Jeff came, Shauna didn't even feel like she was there anymore. She felt like she was just watching it all happen outside of her body. She didn't want to be there. She couldn't make it feel right, she couldn't make it feel good. She didn't want this. Jeff pulled out of her and finished himself off on Shauna's shirt. They drove wordlessly back to her house and Jeff never called again.

Chapter 8

Shauna went the next few days almost completely disassociated. She still went through her life doing everything she normally would, but she didn't really feel present. She was just going through the motions. The short spurts of time that felt like her own were when Jackie was touching her, which honestly made her feel worse. It was great in the moment, obviously, but as soon as it was over she felt rejected somehow. She hated herself for what she did. She hated Jeff for not being able to fill the void that had completely taken over her chest. She hated Jackie for not just being able to tell her that she loved her. Even if it was platonic, even if she didn't fucking mean it. Shauna fucking *needed* it. She couldn't fucking handle it anymore. If Jackie knew something was wrong, she didn't let on. Shauna knew she was being a bitch, but really it had been a few years since she hadn't been a bitch so she couldn't blame Jackie for not thinking it was out of the ordinary.

They were sitting on Shauna's bed. Jackie was watching tv and Shauna was reading Mrs. Dolloway. Shauna looked up at her and just asked. No answer to her question could make her feel worse than she already did. "So, why haven't you been hanging out with Jeff?" Shauna looked at Jackie straight faced, ready for whatever she was going to say.

Jackie laughed and looked at her, confused, "What do you mean?" Had they been hanging out and Shauna just didn't know? They could have, really.

"I'm not complaining, but I went from like splitting time to getting you pretty much every day. I was just wondering if something happened."

Shauna went back to her book, accepting that they probably had just been hanging out and Shauna was just dumb. Jackie responded, "Did something happen with Jeff?" asking for clarification.

"Yeah," Shauna said, still staring at her book without being able to read a single word.

"With me and Jeff?" Shauna was getting irritated. What the fuck else could she mean? It felt like a pretty simple question and to Shauna, it felt like Jackie was just dodging it instead of being straightforward. She didn't mean to, but she snapped.

"Yes, Jax. Jesus, keep up." It was harsh and Shauna regretted it the second she said it, but it wasn't like she could take it back now.

Jackie reached out and touched her arm, "Shauna what do you mean?" Shauna looked up at her. Are they still together? Are they still hanging out? Did they break up? These feel like pretty simple yes or no's and Jackie was starting to test her patience.

"I'm just asking if something happened or if you guys are still together?" Jackie sat up straight at the direct question, like she had to stiffen herself to say what she needed to. Was her plan to just avoid it until Shauna gave up?

"Yes. We're actually hanging out in a couple hours, do you think you could take me home in a bit?" Shauna looked at her for half a second before shutting back down.

"Oh, okay. That makes sense. I can take you home whenever just let me know," she looked back at her book, pretending to read it. Her eyes skimmed the words and she flipped through the pages, but she had no clue what was going on. She knew what Jackie was going to say. If they had broken up she would've told her. If they had gotten in a fight she would've told her. She knew, but it still hurt. It was still fucking horrible. She did that for a half hour before Jackie just asked to go home early. She was probably pissed that Shauna pressed their unspoken boundaries. Why would anything be bad between the two of them? Not like Jackie was cheating on him every fucking day.

Shauna said goodbye to her and told her she loved her, knowing that Jackie wasn't going to say it back. She almost liked how awful it made her feel. It was like she needed the rejection just as bad as she needed the validation at this point. She suddenly realized that her head was a very deranged place to live. She hated everything about herself. She hated everything that she did. She hated everybody that surrounded her. Her whole life was spent fucking herself over and over again to feel a couple minutes of happiness out of a week.

She went home and realized she had missed her mom. She had been so out of it that she hadn't said goodbye to her before her double shift. She couldn't be a good person, she couldn't be a good friend, she couldn't be the lover that Jackie needed, or the soccer player her team needed her to be, and now she was failing as a fucking daughter too. She sat down on the kitchen floor and finally just broke down. She sobbed until she didn't have anything left in her and finally moved herself to the shower and tried to snap herself out of it. She sat in the cold water until she stopped crying, and then she changed into shorts and a sports bra and made her way into the kitchen, looking for anything to do to distract herself from what Jackie had left to do. She did the dishes and cleaned the counters. She cleaned out the fridge and had finally gotten herself calmed down when she heard the door swing open.

It had to have been Jackie. Shauna watched her storm into the kitchen, unable to move. She thought that Jackie knew what she had done and was going to start swinging on her, a beating she was more than willing to take. She deserved it. Jackie walked in with a fire in her eyes and pushed her against the kitchen counter. Jackie just looked at her like she wanted something, like she was angry about something. Shauna had no idea where it was going until Jackie grabbed both sides of her face and kissed her. She was so shocked she couldn't even react to it. She couldn't even kiss her back. Jackie pulled away and Shauna finally had enough time to process. Was she picking her? Was kissing her just their next step or did this mean something more? Shauna didn't care. She wanted more of her. She needed her lips like she had never needed anything before in her life. Shauna leaned back in and kissed her with a passion she didn't know was still inside her. She *needed* her. She grabbed Jackie's hips and pulled her closer, pushing her tongue into her mouth to deepen the kiss. After the initial shock, Jackie grabbed at the backs of Shauna's thighs, digging her fingers into them.

She pushed Shauna up onto the counter and spread her legs so that she could fit herself between them. Jackie moaned softly in her mouth and tried to take control, kissing her harder and deeper. Shauna gasped into it as Jackie squeezed her tits. She pulled her sports bra up and immediately found her nipples with her tongue. Shauna's hands grabbed at her hair and Jackie let her hands roam Shauna's thighs. Shauna was already panting when Jackie pushed two fingers inside her. She moaned and pulled her tighter and closer. Shauna was desperate. She couldn't form thoughts or words. The only thing she could think about was the way Jackie felt inside of her, the way her tongue felt wrapped around her nipples. Shauna

squeezed Jackie's waist with her thighs as she came, but Jackie never slowed down. She fucked her right into her second one, not even acknowledging that Shauna had orgasmed or that she was sensitive. It was like she didn't care, and Shauna fucking *loved* it. "Oh my fucking god, Jax."

Jackie looked up at her as she got down on her knees. Shauna's breath caught in her throat as she lowered herself to the ground. She grabbed Shauna's shorts and said, "Take these off, Shauna." Shauna tore them off of herself and spread her legs eagerly. She wanted Jackie's tongue. She wanted Jackie's *anything* . She just wanted her. She licked up her slit and moaned. Shauna whined when she pulled away. "Fuck, baby. You taste so good." Jackie pushed two fingers inside of her and she prepared herself for more. She prepared herself to be fucked like that, but Jackie pulled them back out, teasing her. She offered Shauna her fingers and Shauna locked eyes with her as she slowly licked up the side of one finger and down the side of the other. She watched Jackie's eyes go dark and she took them completely in her mouth, rolling her eyes back in her head and moaning into them. Jackie started licking slow circles on her clit and Shauna needed more. She grabbed Jackie's head with her hands and ground herself into her face. She threw her head back and moaned, releasing Jackie's fingers and just soaking in the feeling. She could feel every movement of Jackie's tongue and she was living for all of it. As soon as she let Jackie's fingers go she felt them immediately re enter her. Shauna screamed as she met their rhythm, pushing Jackie's fingers as far into herself as they could go before cumming with her hands wrapped around the back of Jackie's neck. Jackie didn't let her rest, though. She took her fingers out and replaced them with her tongue, darting in and out of her, sucking and kissing gently at Shauna's pussy.

Shauna groaned, "Oh my fucking god, Jackie Please don't fucking stop." Jackie applied more pressure with her tongue, moving in rhythmic circles over and over again. Shauna came again, wrapping her thighs so tightly against Jackie's jaw she was worried she was going to break it. She breathed for a few seconds before pushing Jackie back against the fridge. She kissed her, sucking roughly on her lips. She could taste herself on them and she moaned into her mouth at the taste. She gripped Jackie's skirt and pulled it down with one sharp movement. She pulled her thigh up to wrap it around her waist and held her body up with one arm. Jackie understood what she wanted and wrapped her legs around Shauna's hips. She held her as close as humanly possible and moved two fingers up to her pussy. She was dripping. Shauna touched her opening and could feel her wetness actually dripping down her fingers.

"Oh god, baby. You're so wet." Jackie nodded frantically and squeezed her thighs.

"All for you, Shauna. It's all for you, please." Shauna moaned and threw her head back. Jackie had *never* said anything like that before, and it was all Shauna had ever wanted. She fucked Jackie hard and rough, thrusting with her hand and moving Jackie's whole body with her other arm. Jackie was screaming. Shauna could feel her pussy clench against her fingers over and over again. She didn't care. She wanted to watch her come undone. She wanted to watch how far she could push her before her body gave out. When Jackie could barely keep her eyes open, Shauna walked her over to the couch and laid her down, ready to give her a breather. She just wanted her shirt off. She wanted to see all of her, she wanted to kiss and lick and touch all of her. She pulled Jackie's shirt off and saw a hickey on her neck. She saw it and she knew that Jackie had fucked him. She knew. Jeff had left a mark on her and fucking claimed her. All Shauna wanted to do was leave worse. She wanted everybody to

fucking know that Jackie was hers. Not fucking Jeff's. The primal rage and possessiveness overtook any kind of hurt or pain she could've felt in that moment. She didn't take her eyes off of it as she talked to her.

"You guys… you?" Jackie knew what she was asking and she didn't answer right away. Shauna looked up at her eyes and saw her nod her head slowly. Shauna pounced. It was like her body knew exactly what she needed. Her right hand grabbed for Jackie's clit, rubbing it in circles as she attacked that spot on her neck. She bit and sucked on Jeff's hickey until she knew it would be there for weeks. She made it darker, bigger, and entirely her own. It was like Jeff didn't even exist. All she should think about was him on top of her, him sucking on her neck. He couldn't have satisfied her the way Shauna could. She wouldn't be here if he could. As she sucked and bit at her neck, she fucked Jackie harder and harder, relentlessly. Jackie's moans turned into just a steady flow of screams. She came hard, her whole body shaking violently with her orgasm. Shauna kissed up her neck and back to her lips as Jackie came down from her high, letting her work through it gently. Shauna collapsed on top of her and Jackie started to laugh.

"That was fucking insane…" Jackie said it through ragged, broken breaths. "This is real, right?" Shauna wasn't sure either. Jackie had come out of nowhere like something out of Shauna's dreams. Honestly, none of the last few weeks had seemed real. It all just felt like she was either dreaming or dissociated, unable to tell what was real from what wasn't.

Shauna exhaled, too out of breath to laugh back, "Were you thinking this was all just a really convenient string of dreams too?" Jackie looked up at her and Shauna watched her eyelids get heavy. She was trying to stay awake, but she was exhausted. Shauna was too. They held each other and laughed.

"When is your mom getting home?" Jackie asked. She could barely keep her eyes open.

"A couple hours, maybe." They both took a deep breath and helped each other off of the couch, slowly picking up the items of clothing they had thrown around the house and making their way up the stairs to pass out fully clothed and in bed.

The next three weeks went by in a constant cycle of self hatred and happiness. Her and Jackie were pretty much together. They hadn't been able to stop, and they had spent every spare second together and finding ways to get some privacy. Jackie was still with Jeff, something that Shauna wasn't sure how to handle. Some days she didn't care, and some days it felt like the most important thing in the world. Her guilt grew every day. The happier she felt the worse she felt. She knew the other shoe was about to drop, and she had convinced herself somehow that her fucking Jeff was actually Jackie's fault. She tried desperately to alleviate her guilt in her journal, but it was no use. Each entry just got more and more deranged. It got to a point that Shauna couldn't even reread what she had written. She knew it was hateful and mean, and then she'd go and allow herself to be somewhat happy with Jackie. She felt like every entry moved her further from the person she wanted to be. She knew it was her fault, but she couldn't handle that she could ruin her life entirely of her own volition. The guilt was eating at her every day, and the only thing that ever made it stop was time spent with Jackie. Not as best friends, but something more. They had talked a little more, but not really. It still felt like Shauna was Jackie's middle ground before she went and found a husband at Rutgers. It felt like Jackie just thought the sex was good and would tide her over until then. Shauna was still hurt. She hated that Jeff had gotten to fuck her. She

hated that Jackie had wanted to do it. She knew that it was her doing and she pushed her into it, but it still fucking *hurt* . She buried it, though. As long as she could hear Jackie tell her she wanted her, as long as she could hear Jackie tell her how much she needed her, Shauna would do anything.

On a Friday a few weeks later, they went over to Lottie's. She was having a sleepover to get everybody to hang out again, and Shauna was kind of excited to just drink with a group of girls in an environment that didn't include Jeff. The whole drive over, Shauna had to use every ounce of self control to keep herself focused on the road. The thought of a night of drinking together without Jeff there to hide from just made her want to pull the car over and fuck Jackie on the side of the road. They walked in and everybody was already there. They were greeted with hugs and warm welcomes, and it felt really nice that everybody was so excited to see them. They walked up the stairs to set Shauna's bag down while everybody drank and played music at a deafening volume downstairs. Shauna set the bag down by the closet in Lottie's guest room and Jackie immediately pinned her against the door. Shauna smiled and watched her eyes move down her body, over her lips and her tits. Jackie *wanted* her.

"Somebody could walk in," Shauna said.

"They're busy." Jackie leaned in and kissed her, moving her hands under Shauna's shirt and grabbing hard at her tits. Shauna moaned into her mouth. Jesus Christ. Shauna reached and palmed Jackie's ass, pulling her close and squeezing it. It felt like Jackie was hers in that moment… even though she wasn't. It felt like Shauna was the only one she wanted, and Shauna fucking loved it. Jackie pushed her bra up and pinched her nipples, burying Shauna's moan in her mouth. She pulled away and just grinned at her. She knew what she had just done, she was being a little tease. Shauna took a second to catch her breath and try to convince herself to not out them both right now and drive them home before she followed Jackie out the door. She needed a drink like right now. They drank probably way too much, and by the time Van turned the music down and demanded they all play a game, Shauna was drunk. Watching Jackie all night smiling at her and looking at her like she had never done a bad thing in her whole life just filled her with guilt. She knew how much her opinion would change if she really knew who Shauna was, and that was hard to live with.

Shauna knew how awful she was. She was sitting in a room full of people who thought Jackie and Jeff were the perfect couple, and she had fucked both of them now without the other knowing. How sick was that? She buried it, understanding that Jackie could never know. She just had to keep shoving it further and further down until she forgot about it completely.

They started their game of Never Have I Ever and Shauna went first, sending a playful jab to Jackie, "Never have I ever been so hung over I had to throw up."

She watched Jackie smile and watched her eyes shine when she looked at her, "Okay, okay. Whatever." She took a drink and Shauna realized she was staring as she swallowed it. Nat snickered next to her and Shauna turned and gave her a confused look. She didn't say a word, just shrugged and smiled at Shauna. She knew. Or at least she knew that Shauna was staring. Jackie's voice snapped her head back around to the other side of her, "Never have I ever stolen anything." Nat, Van and Lottie all drank, which resulted in an interrogation because why would Lottie ever need to steal anything.

Nat glared at Jackie around Shauna, “Okay Ms. Goody Two Shoes,” Shauna watched Nat roll her eyes and turned to Jackie. They made eye contact and Jackie’s smile was back. She was playing nice. Usually she would’ve gone right back at Nat, but maybe she was making an effort for Shauna. It was kind of sweet.

A couple turns later Tai said, “Never have I ever had sex.” Shauna stared straight ahead, knowing that not drinking was a lie in multiple ways now. She didn’t want to look at Jackie drinking. She didn’t want to think about her fucking Jeff. She just pretended to laugh with the rest of the group at Mari, Nat and Lottie.

Lottie was next, “Never have I ever done something I regret while drunk.” Shauna laughed and took a drink. So many fucking times. She was hammered every time she fucked Jeff and it turned out to be her absolute biggest mistake and regret. So she took a long drink, avoiding Jackie’s gaze and turning to Lottie instead, who was talking about something that Shauna couldn’t pay attention to.

Laura Lee hit her hard with the next one. “Never have I ever lied to someone I care about.” Shauna lied to her every day. She actually just fucking did. She looked up at Jackie who didn’t drink and she just felt fucking sad. She was so awful to her. She had no idea how evil Shauna was.

When the game ended, Shauna kept her distance. She was trying to get her head right before she gave anything away. She watched Jackie trip and spill cranberry juice all over her shirt trying to make a drink. She laughed at her across the room. She couldn’t hear what she was saying to Lottie but then Jackie turned to her and spoke a little louder with a little grin, “Shauna where’d you put our bag?” She winked and Shauna smiled at her and looked away quickly, trying not to be too obvious. “Upstairs, guest room.” Which she already knew, obviously.

Nat showed up next to her and laughed, “At least she didn’t spill the liquor.”

“Still plenty of that. Wanna take a shot?” Shauna asked her. Nat jumped up and poured a couple out for them. They downed them and ran for their chasers. Cheap liquor never got better, no matter how many times she drank it. She was laughing with Nat when her whole world came crumbling down around her.

She heard her before she saw her, screaming as she walked into the room, “What the FUCK is your fucking problem, Shauna?” Shauna turned to look at her, feeling her heart sink into her ass. She had taken her shirt off and had Shauna’s journal in hand. She knew. Shauna had no clue what she had written. She had no clue what Jackie had read. It was awful and terrible and cruel and mean. That was all she knew. Her first thought was that Jackie was going to be so angry and upset she’d out herself, which Shauna knew she couldn’t handle and definitely didn’t want. She moved toward Jackie, needing to get her journal back. She tried to reach for it but Jackie just opened it up, “No Shauna. Let’s tell the class what the fuck you’ve been up to, why don’t we?” Shauna watched as tears ran down her face, feeling like she just wanted the floor to open up and suck her into it. She hated herself more in that moment than ever before. Jackie was so hurt and it was all her fault. Shauna knew other people were talking, but she couldn’t hear them. All she could see or hear was Jackie. She ran after her in the kitchen, trying to get the journal back before Jackie could read it out loud and expose herself as somebody who fucked other girls.

"Jackie, stop. Let's just go talk about it. We can just go outside."

"I NEVER SHOULD HAVE FUCKED JEFF!" Jackie screamed the words so loudly they echoed in Lottie's kitchen. Shauna watched her face as she started to laugh. Jackie's reputation could survive that one line, even if Shauna's couldn't. It needed to end here. Shauna lunged for the journal again and Van stepped in between them, not letting Shauna anywhere near her. Jackie continued to read and Shauna was forced to just stand there and listen. She was forced to stand there and watch the tears roll down her face, and the expression full of pain and anger she wore. 'She practically fucking forced me to,' Jackie read, "She's always been the center of everything—always–," thankfully, Tai grabbed Shauna's journal out of her hand. Shauna just stared at her. She knew she had ruined this. She knew she had hurt Jackie more than should've been possible, but she just couldn't look away from her. Jackie really started to break down and Shauna wanted to hold her and kiss her but she couldn't. "Is this really how you fucking feel about me?"

Shauna needed to get through to her. This was not the place for this conversation. Maybe Jackie thought so when she was drunk and upset, but she would regret it tomorrow and Shauna needed her to understand that. "Fucking stop, Jackie. We can just go talk, right now. Stop."

Jackie didn't. It was like she couldn't. "Do you really fucking hate me so much you'd do anything to hurt me? Is that really what this is?" Shauna looked at the ground, knowing that she just had to take it now and they'd talk later. She refused to say anything to out her to the team, no matter how badly she needed Jackie to know she loved her. Jackie's voice got quieter, "You fucked him while we…" she paused, staring into Shauna's soul and forcing her to look up to wait for the line that would really fuck her over now, "while we were together?" Shauna was shocked at how subtle the question was. Most people would probably think she was asking if Shauna did it while she and Jeff had been broken up, but Shauna knew. She knew her answer to the question would truly break her. She wanted to tell her how much she had regretted it, how much she had hated it, but she couldn't. Not with everybody here. Jackie's face fell and Shauna knew that she had her answer.

"You are fucking despicable. You are a miserable fucking bitch Shauna, congratulations because you just completely ruined this. I LOVED you, Shauna. You were the only person who fucking mattered to me and you did THIS?" Shauna felt like she had been shot with every word. NOW she wanted to tell her? NOW she could tell Shauna she loved her? NOW she could tell her that she mattered to her? The first time Jackie told her she loved her and this is why? Didn't she know that those three words would've stopped any of this from ever fucking happening in the first place? She got defensive, like she always fucking did. It was like the part of her that had been dedicated to her journals was now in control of her mouth and she had no power over what she was about to say.

"You have a really fucking funny way of showing it Jackie. I was never important to you. I was always just there. You bring me everywhere to sit in the corner and be a good little sidekick so that you can drop me off at home at the end of the night. You don't see me, you don't even fucking KNOW me, Jackie." By the end of it, she was screaming back at her.

"You are fucking crazy, Shauna. YOU slept with MY boyfriend, but somehow you're STILL the victim? I had no idea you could be this much of a hateful, jealous bitch."

Shauna was in no way in control of herself. She didn't even know what she was going to say before it came pouring out of her mouth. Everything she said had been building up for years. It had been building for over a decade at this point, and if this was where they were arguing then Shauna didn't feel like she had much of a choice. "God fucking forbid I have my own thoughts, right Jackie? God forbid I have an opinion of you that you didn't instill into me. That's what you do, you know. You fucking force feed me your own thoughts like they're supposed to be my own, like I'm some idiot toddler that needs guidance. I am so smart, Jackie. I am so capable of making my own choices. Believe me, Jackie, I got into fucking BROWN, I am completely capable." Fuck. Shauna closed her eyes and took a deep breath, processing what she had just said. Well… it all had to come out sometime. Might as well do it all at once. Jackie's whole body went limp. Shauna could see all the fight and all the passion leave her body in real time, and it broke her.

"You applied to Brown…" it wasn't a scream, it was barely even talking volume. It was like it escaped her more than she spoke it. Jackie looked at her with nothing but hatred and hurt, and Shauna knew she deserved it but it didn't make it hurt any less. Jackie took a swig straight from a bottle of vodka and leaned onto the counter. Shauna finally looked around at the room, realizing that these people were probably never going to speak to her again.

"I think you need to go home, Shauna," Van said, staring into her soul. It wasn't a suggestion, Shauna was getting kicked out. She looked up at Tai, who still had her journal and pulled it from her hands. Tai was looking at her like she could fucking strangle her and honestly, Shauna kind of hoped she would. Maybe it would make her feel better to get her ass beat. Shauna walked up the stairs to grab her bag, resigned to walking the rest of the way home tonight. She sat down on the bed in the guest room and started to cry. It felt so ridiculous, crying like that when she was the one that did it.

"You can't drive." Nat was standing behind her.

"I wasn't going to. I can walk."

"Don't you live on Buchanan? That's like 6 miles." Shauna shrugged and Nat sat down next to her. 'You're drunk and alone. You are not walking 6 miles in the dark. I've got a friend who lives down the street. Let's just crash there tonight and we can come back for your car tomorrow.' Shauna shook her head. She wanted to walk back to her house alone. She wanted whatever was going to happen to just happen. She deserved it anyway. "Shauna, she called Jeff to come pick you up." Shauna's head snapped up. She did *not* want to see Jeff. "Listen I obviously don't understand what's going on here… but it doesn't feel like it's about Jeff. I'm giving you two options." Shauna sighed and rubbed her face.

"Fine. Let's go." Shauna grabbed her bag and followed Nat out of the bedroom. They walked out the front door, not daring to look back at the kitchen and made their way down the street in silence. They got to Kevyn Tan's house and Nat knocked on the door. Shauna didn't hear them. All she could think about was Jackie. She was so hurt. Shauna had done that. Shauna had hurt her like that. Nat grabbed her arm and led her to the basement couch. Shauna threw herself onto it and forced herself to close her eyes until morning.

Chapter 9

Shauna couldn't sleep. She laid there unmoving all night, thinking about how the first time she heard Jackie say 'I love you' was in past tense. She was so angry and so full of hate for herself. If she loved her, why the fuck couldn't she have just *said* that. Why did she have to keep throwing Jeff in her face and responding to all of her I love you's with waves and smiles? If Shauna was the only thing that mattered to her, why the fuck couldn't she have just SAID that. *I LOVED you* , she had said. She said it with so much hurt in her voice, Shauna just kept replaying it over and over again. By 5 am she needed to get out of there. She found Nat asleep next to her in a recliner and shook her awake.

"Can we go?" Nat sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"Fuck," she looked up at Shauna and kind of recoiled. She must have looked like shit, 'Yeah. We can go.' She got up and didn't bother trying to talk to Kevyn before they walked out his front door. It was a much shorter walk than it had felt last night. They walked silently until they got to the Matthews' front yard. Shauna looked up at the front door. She wanted to go back inside. She wanted to wake Jackie up and apologize. She wanted to kiss her and just make it all better, but that wasn't how any of this was going to work. "You want to go inside?" Nat asked. Shauna looked down at her feet.

"And say what?" Nat shrugged and Shauna unlocked her car, assuming that she would just get in the passenger seat, but she didn't. She stood there watching Shauna carefully. 'Aren't you gonna get in?' Nat grinned a little and got in the car. "Want a ride home?"

Nat laughed. "No. You can just drop me at the school, it's not far." Shauna looked up at her confused. She wasn't just going to drop Nat off at the high school on a Saturday morning, what the fuck?

"On a Saturday? What, are you gonna sleep there?" Nat shrugged and Shauna realized that yeah, she was gonna sleep there. She knew that Nat didn't love being at home but she didn't know she hated it that much. Shauna stared at her, needing more information.

"Coach Martinez gave me a key to the locker room. I usually just crash on the couch in his office." Shauna raised her eyebrows, not having the patience to explain why that was insane. "Jesus, Shipman. I'll just walk." She opened Shauna's car door and slammed it shut behind her. Shauna sighed and trailed her down the street despite her growing headache.

"You are the only one that actually cared if I lived or died last night, I'm not letting you go sleep in the locker room and I'm definitely not letting you walk there. Get in the fucking car." Nat stopped walking and turned to look at her. Shauna parked the car, leaned over and opened the passenger side door from the inside. Nat rolled her eyes and climbed in. They drove to Shauna's house in silence. She was glad to see her mom had already left for work. She couldn't imagine facing her right now and trying to explain what happened last night.

Shauna unlocked her door and held it open for Nat, who cautiously stepped inside. "Is your mom not here?"

"No. She's working." Nat nodded and Shauna noticed how uncomfortable she seemed. "I'm gonna go take a shower. There's probably some cereal and coffee in the kitchen. Make yourself at home." She didn't look for Nat's reaction, knowing that she probably wouldn't eat or drink anything, but hoping she'd at least sit on the couch or something. Shauna walked up to her bedroom and opened her journal to her last entry. *Why* would Jackie fucking read her journal? She never meant any of it. That was the whole fucking point. She wrote down everything she didn't mean so that she wouldn't say it out loud. Now Jackie probably thought all the awful things Shauna had written were true. She felt sick.

I never should have fucked Jeff. She practically fucking forced me to. She's always been the center of everything—always getting everything she wants, everyone loving her. And I'm just here, in her shadow, fucking invisible to her and to everyone else. I've spent my whole life pretending it doesn't bother me, but it does. I hate it. I hate her, and it made me such a fucking miserable loser that I had to sleep with him, over and over again, for absolutely no reason other than to feel something.

Shauna started to cry. Jackie really believed that was how Shauna felt about her. She sat down on the floor and held her head between her legs, rocking back and forth. She had ruined everything. She had absolutely ruined her whole fucking life. The only person she has ever loved HATES her and always will. All of her friends hate her, she's going to college 4 hours from home with all new people to realize how fucking cruel and unlikable she is. This was going to be her whole life, just ruining it over and over again. She had ruined her relationship with her best friend who she had fallen head over heels for, and worse than that… she took another daughter away from her mom. How was she going to explain this? Deb was going to be gutted. She heard a knock at her bedroom door and looked up to find Nat standing there cautiously.

"Hey… I didn't hear the shower start and it's been like 30 minutes. I got a little worried, I guess." Shauna looked up at her and then looked back down, realizing how blurry her vision was from her tears. "I can leave you alone if that's what you want, I just… I don't want you to do anything stupid, okay?" Like kill herself? She wasn't going to kill herself. She was hurting and she deserved every second of it. She deserved to live and feel every second of this pain. She owed that to Jackie.

"Anything stupid…" Shauna said, looking up at Nat to show her she knew what she meant by it, "would be too kind." Nat blinked and just kind of looked at her, unsure of what to do next. She almost looked a little vulnerable before straightening up and returning to her normal state.

"Get in the shower, Shipman." It was kind of sweet, Shauna realized. Nat actually cared. She turned around and walked back down the stairs, leaving Shauna to get her clothes and a towel and go sit down under the boiling hot water until it ran cold. She got out, changed her clothes and walked downstairs to Nat cooking in the kitchen. Shauna was pleasantly surprised. It seemed a little too domestic for her, but Shauna was just happy she felt comfortable enough to do it. Nat looked up at her and nodded her head. She put a plate of scrambled eggs and toast in front of an empty chair at the table. "Eat."

Shauna sat down and played with the food. She didn't have much of an appetite but this was probably the nicest thing Nat had ever done for anybody on the team, so she forced a few

bites down her throat. “Thank you.” Nat nodded again and sat down next to her with her own plate.

“You want to talk about it?” Neither one of them looked up from their food.

“Talk about what?” She felt Nat’s eyes on her and looked up to see her nod. She wasn’t gonna make her talk if she didn’t want to, and Shauna was grateful for that. They spent the day pretty much in silence. They sat next to each other in the living room and Shauna pretended to be interested in whatever Nat had put on the tv. She just kept thinking about the look on Jackie’s face when she stormed down the stairs. She looked like she was in physical pain that got worse with every second of their argument.

Her mom got home at 3. When she saw that Natalie was there she beamed and gave her a hug, “Natalie Scartorrcio! Oh my, honey it’s so good to see you.” Nat smiled more genuinely than Shauna had ever seen. It made her wonder how often her mother greeted her that way.

“Oh, hi Ms. Shipman. It’s good to see you too.” Deb smiled at her and gave Shauna a hug too, which was much needed. She held Shauna’s face in her hands and looked at her. She knew something was wrong.

“What’s Jackie up to?” Shauna’s eyes shifted to her feet.

“Excuse me, I’m sorry I’m just gonna use the bathroom if that’s okay,” Nat said, finding a way to be anywhere but in the middle of that conversation. Shauna nodded at her and looked back to her mom.

“Jackie might not be around as much…” Deb’s brow furrowed and she shook her head.

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous honey, you guys never fight for very long.”

“No mom, it was different. She… she’s not gonna be around.” Shauna started to cry and her mom pulled her into another hug.

“What happened?”

Shauna couldn’t tell her. She couldn’t come out to her mom like that… she didn’t even know how to describe any of it. What were they? What had they been? “The Brown thing… she didn’t take it well.” Deb pulled away to look at Shauna and she could tell that her mom wasn’t buying it, but it looked like it had really hit her that she wasn’t going to be seeing Jackie. Shauna watched a tear fall from her eye and something inside her broke. ‘I’m so sorry, momma.’ She started crying again and her mom held her for a while. When she had calmed down, she thought of Natalie. “Mom, I think Nat needs somewhere to stay for a while… is that okay?”

“Yes, honey of course. The Shipman house has an open door policy for anybody who needs it, you know that.” Shauna smiled. Her mom looked exhausted but she knew she’d never let herself go lay down if her daughter wasn’t doing well.

“I’m okay, mom. Nat’s here. Why don’t you go to bed?”

“Are you sure? I can stay with you, we can watch something?”

"It's okay. Seriously, Nat's trying to get me into the X-files so…" Deb kissed her forehead and headed to her bedroom, closing the door behind her. Nat came back downstairs a few minutes later.

"What does she do?" she asked, probably confused about her unusual work schedule.

"She's an ER nurse. She's been picking up shifts to try to help with Brown, actually."

"That's really cool, actually." Shauna nodded. Her mom was pretty cool.

"You can stay as long as you want to, you know. It's kind of her thing. We have like an open door policy, everybody's welcome."

Nat squinted at her, "Did you ever consider that maybe I *liked* crashing in the locker room?"

No. Shauna had not considered that. "Have I ever considered that you liked sleeping among the smell of BO and Coach Martinez's cologne? No, not really." Nat grinned at her.

"I mean, the couch is pretty comfy. We've got showers and lockers and shit in there. It's not so bad."

"Well we've got a shower, spare room in my closet and a fully functioning kitchen around the corner. You don't have to stay if you don't want to, but you're welcome to." Nat thought about it, not willing to make eye contact with Shauna.

"Thank you." Shauna nodded at her.

Nat stayed at the Shipman's for the next two days. Shauna had sat by the phone for hours, wondering if she should call. Eventually, she caved. She listened to the phone ring and heard the Taylor's voicemail message. Shit. What could she say on a voicemail her parents could overhear. She hesitated before just jumping into it.

"Jackie… I'm so sorry. It's so much more complicated than you probably think. I just want to explain it to you. Please." She wanted to tell her that she loved her and that Jeff meant nothing, but she didn't want her parents to read into it. She said all that she really could say.

Her and Nat really didn't speak much at all. It all felt like her body was slowly rotting from the inside out, and she just felt hollow and empty, which was probably preferable to the pain and heartbreak she knew was buried somewhere deep down. Shauna journalled about how much she hated herself and her life and every decision she's ever made and Nat rifled through her CDs, seemingly surprised by her music taste. "You've got like every second best album of some of the best bands to ever exist. It's a very strange mix in here."

Shauna rolled her eyes and laughed, "Is that some kind of weird compliment?"

"More like an observation… like, you have *In Utero* but not *Nevermind? The Bends* but no *OK Computer?* Some weird shit, Shipman."

"*OK Computer* is too much, and *Nevermind* is overplayed." Nat rolled her eyes and threw *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* into her CD player.

"Shauna, bro… Sheryl Crow? Are you fucking serious?"

Shauna looked up and then immediately back down. “It’s Jackie’s.” Nat put the CD back and they dropped it for a few seconds.

“So you guys were… together, or?” Shauna looked up at her, unintentionally glaring.

“No. I don’t… I don’t think so?” Shauna was unsure of how to answer that question. What were they?

“Yeah that’s super convincing.”

“She was with Jeff.” Nat rolled her eyes.

“Sure. All this is about fucking Jeff Sadecki.” Shauna looked up at her. None of this was about Jeff.

“I don’t think I have ever thought about Jeff in a significant way. He means like… less than nothing to me, but I don’t know if that’s true for Jackie.” Nat nodded, and went back to the CDs. Shauna went back to her journal.

She loved him, didn’t she? That was the whole reason for all of this. She didn’t want Shauna because she didn’t love her the way she could love a man. As evil as Shauna might have been, all she ruined was a toxic friends with benefits situation, right? If Jackie loved Jeff, that was all they’d ever be.

“You write a lot,” Nat said, studying Shauna’s face for more information. Shauna laughed a little. She did write a lot. That was like half the issue, right?

“It used to help.”

“Help with what?”

“Doing and saying fucked up shit, breaking things, getting in fights.” Nat cocked her head to the side like she wanted to say something but she stopped herself, “What?”

“No, nothing.”

Shauna stared at her. “No, tell me.”

“I just… you used to be more fun then. Watching you get red cards once a game in middle school was kinda fun.” Shauna smiled for the first time in days.

“Yeah I don’t know that my victims would feel the same way.”

Nat shrugged, “You never did it for no reason. They deserved it.” Shauna smiled and Nat continued, “Should’ve known you were down bad ever since you broke that girl’s leg for accidentally bumping into the Princess.”

Shauna sent Nat a glare at the nickname. She held her hands up innocently, “Don’t call her that. And it was not accidental.” Nat laughed.

“Lottie always knew, did you know that?” Shauna shook her head. Lottie knew what? “She had this theory in like 7th grade that you two were dating. She only told me, I think. We used to be closer back then.”

Shauna chose to ignore the dating theory, deeming it too painful to discuss right now. Jackie wouldn’t ever date her. That felt pretty clear. “Why’d you guys fall off?”

Nat sighed, “I don’t really know. It was never like bad or awkward, she was just kind of different. We got to high school and just started running in different crowds, I guess.” Shauna nodded. Her and Jackie probably would’ve done the same thing if Shauna had actually done the things she enjoyed and not just the stuff Jackie liked. It was quiet for a second. “Did you mean it? The stuff Jackie read out?”

Shauna dropped her head down and looked at her lap. Did she? She wrote it. It must’ve meant something. “I don’t know.” Nat looked at her and Shauna sighed. She wanted more information, and honestly she probably deserved more. Shauna knew she looked fucking awful and she was still here worried about her two days later. She hadn’t really spoken since they got home and Shauna could at least recognize how concerning that probably was. “I’m supposed to write all the bad stuff that runs through my head in my journal so that I don’t accidentally say it out loud. I guess that means I still thought it, so maybe. But I would’ve never told her any of that.” She wouldn’t have. As mean as she could be, she would’ve *never* said any of that out loud. But now Jackie knew how fucking twisted her brain was. Jackie knew all of the mean and evil shit she had written down. Shauna was something way beyond ashamed.

Nat nodded and went quiet for a minute, “I feel like what you say when your thoughts are well regulated is more important than what you write down when you’re upset.” Shauna looked up at her. Was Natalie being… nice to her? “The effort you make to not say things probably means that you don’t think they’re true. I don’t know that the stuff you write in there has to be a reflection of who you are, you know?”

Shauna considered it. “Maybe… I feel like I can’t tell if I’m a reflection of the things I write down or if the things I let myself actually say are the real things.”

“Probably both. But I think you’re also a reflection of your efforts to do the right thing. Everybody says and thinks fucked up shit, but you put a lot of effort into not hurting anybody. That counts for something too.” Shauna thought about it. Maybe Nat was right, but still her efforts clearly weren’t enough. They moved on, the softness of the conversation feeling a little uncomfortable for them both, and Shauna spent the night trying to convince herself that the world wasn’t going to end when she returned to school the next day. She couldn’t sleep. Jackie’s hurt expression burned through her eyelids and prevented any chance of it. Shauna eventually just took another melatonin. Willing her thoughts away was clearly not going to work.

Chapter 10

The next morning she drove herself and Nat over to Jackie's house. Shauna wanted to see her and she couldn't handle the thought of her without anybody to drive her to school. It was their routine, and if Jackie needed her she'd be there. They sat in her driveway for a few minutes, but it didn't seem like anybody was home.

"Even if she was here, you really think she'd get in the car? The only person she hates more than me right now is you."

"I just wanted to make sure she had a ride. I don't know. Probably stupid." Nat didn't say anything as they pulled out of the driveway. They got to school way too early and Nat convinced her to go to the locker room. Nobody was using it now that they were out of season, and all of Nat's stuff was in one of the lockers Coach Martinez kept in his office. She pulled out a joint and lit it, offering it to Shauna. They sat down on the benches and smoked for a while in silence, looking at the scouting report from the team they lost to in Nationals. It felt so long ago now. It was in Jackie's handwriting. She remembered when Jackie had been walking them through the film session, something that wasn't required but that Jackie insisted on. She had wanted to win so badly.

Shauna took another long drag, "You think she's gonna be there today?"

"Jackie Taylor hiding, tucking her tail and looking like a kicked puppy to the whole senior class two weeks before graduation? I don't think so." Nat was probably right. Jackie wouldn't risk the hit to her reputation. "My guess, she's here today looking the best she's ever looked and making sure everybody sees that she's still untouchable."

"You think she's just… fine?"

"I said I think she's going to look like she's fine. I don't have enough context to know if she'd be fine or not, but generally I think your best friend sleeping with your boyfriend would result in more than a couple days of being upset." Shauna flinched at her words, "Sorry." Nat passed the joint back as an apology and Shauna accepted it.

"It's true, no need to apologize for it."

"Are you ready to see her? Are you gonna try to talk to her?"

"No and maybe." Nat nodded, accepting that as her answer and not asking for further explanation. Truly, Shauna fucking *missed* her. She missed her smile and her laugh and her touch. She missed the way Jackie yelled at her and bossed her around. Sure she kind of hated it, but she would've done anything to be told what to do now. For the last couple weeks they had been inseparable. A day didn't pass where Shauna didn't touch her or kiss her, and now she's just… gone.

"Maybe you need to like run or something," Nat suggested.

"What?" Shauna asked. Run where?

"Well you weren't fucking Jeff while you were regularly exercising, right?"

Shauna thought about it. It had definitely been going on during soccer season. "I was, actually." Nat's jaw dropped.

"Jesus Christ. How long had it been going on?"

"Like 2 or 3 months, I guess. We hadn't in a couple weeks though. I was done."

Nat stared at her for a moment before getting back on track, "Well… maybe your journaling needs some help. Like, if your first thought is some kind of physical outlet, like you know breaking things or… fucking Jeff," Shauna glanced over at her, not appreciative of all of the details, "Maybe you need a better physical outlet. Like running or something."

Shauna thought about it for a minute, "Yeah. Maybe." They finished off the joint and walked into the now very full school. Nat left to go find Kevyn and it didn't take long for Shauna to find Jackie at her locker. She looked fucking *hot* . She was wearing a tight skirt with a white damn near see through shirt. Jackie knew exactly what bra she was wearing. It was black and a little lacy, not that anybody else could tell. Jackie knew Shauna would be the only one. It was for her. Shauna couldn't see her face, but her ass and the backs of her legs looked fucking amazing in that skirt. She was practically drooling until she realized what Jackie was doing. She was leaning into fucking Carson Adams. She had a hand on his chest and just by her body language Shauna could tell she was flirting with him. She scowled at them, unable to look away no matter how much it hurt her to watch. Carson was smiling at her, blushing at her touch. Shauna wanted to fucking kill him. He leaned down and kissed Jackie's cheek, and Shauna felt her soul settle in her stomach. Her whole body was hot and if she wasn't a little high she might have actually killed him. Shauna turned around and walked outside. She needed fresh air and as much space between her and Carson as possible. She felt like her throat was swelling up and she started to hyperventilate against the wall of the building. Her vision got blurry and she slowly slid down to sit on her butt, leaned up against the wall. She slowed herself down out of anybody's eyesight, taking deep breaths over and over again until the anxiety attack fell away. As soon as she could, she stood back up and walked into first period. Her day was hell. Jackie had made her schedule at the start of the semester, so they were in almost every class together. Jackie refused to even look at her. She acted like Shauna wasn't even there. She actually looked through Shauna to talk to somebody else at one point.

Shauna felt like shit. All she could do was stare at Jackie all day, and all Jackie did was pretend she wasn't there. After lunch, Shauna tried to follow her to her locker, only to be cut off by Taissa.

"Leave her alone. If she wanted to talk to you she would," Tai said.

"Fuck off Tai. You don't know what you're talking about."

"It doesn't matter. You've said enough." Shauna was glaring at her and Tai looked like she softened a little bit, "She will reach out when she's ready, Shauna. Let her breathe." Tai turned to catch up with Jackie. Shauna skipped the next period. Jackie looked like she was doing just fine. Talking to a new guy, hanging out with new friends who actually protected her feelings and treated her well. She didn't need Shauna, and she probably deserved better than Shauna anyway. She found Nat under the bleachers.

"Not going to class today?" Shauna asked.

Nat shrugged, "What happened with you?"

"Fucking Tai wouldn't let me anywhere near her."

"She's got a new bodyguard, huh?"

"Guess so." Nat smiled at her.

"I'm going over to Kevyn's after school, just so you know. Don't need a ride."

Shauna nodded. "I just want to talk to her." She buried her face in her hands. Her stomach was in knots, she was fucking miserable.

"You didn't even like her, Shauna. It's just Jackie. You're about to go to Brown and find somebody less concerned with the way everybody looks at them."

Shauna stood up. "Of course I like her, Nat. I'm fucking in love with her. Don't fucking talk about her like that."

"Woah, woah, woah. My bad." Nat said, trying to diffuse the situation. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to piss you off."

Shauna sighed. God she was fucking losing it. "Fuck, I'm sorry. I'm just a little on edge. Maybe a run or something would be good." Nat laughed.

"It's okay, I get it. I'm sorry for shit talking. I know you're torn up about it."

"No, no. It— she wasn't ever very nice to you. I'm sorry I never stopped it."

Nat looked down and shrugged. "It's alright. She never said anything I hadn't heard before."

"Still. I should've said something." Nat nodded and stood up, brushing the dirt off her jeans.

"Let's go back to class, Shipman. Only one left."

When the final bell rang, Shauna grabbed her stuff and went out to the soccer field. She started to stretch a little and try to clear her mind. It wasn't really working. Shauna started running laps around the field, trying to push all her feelings through her feet and into the ground… or to punish herself by making her lungs and her legs burn. It was honestly starting to work until she noticed Jackie and fucking Carson in the football bleachers. She slowed down and stood there watching them. Jackie had to have known she was there. She watched Jackie lay her head on his shoulder. He laughed at something she said and Shauna sat down in the grass. Jackie turned her body and Shauna could see her face. She was so far away, but still so beautiful. Shauna felt like she was going to throw up. Jackie leaned in and kissed him, and Shauna felt all of the blood drain from her body. All she could do was fucking watch it. Shauna really meant that little to her? She could just kiss somebody else? Just like that? She pulled away and they talked a little while longer before Jackie stood up and turned to look at her. Of course she knew she was there. They locked eyes, and even from so far away Shauna felt the effects of it. She felt her throat start to close up when Jackie walked

away, so instead of sitting through another panic attack, she grabbed her stuff and sprinted to her car. Jackie was walking through the parking lot as she did.

"Jackie!" She didn't look at her, didn't change her pace, didn't give any indication that she had even heard her. "Jackie seriously, you can't just ignore me forever. Let's talk about this!" Jackie ducked into the building and Shauna put the car in drive, trying to drive through the parking lot to the front entrance. She got there just in time to see Tai's car pull away. Fucking great.

She drove home and made dinner for her mom. She had to leave at 5 and Shauna wanted to make sure she had something to eat when she woke up to get ready. She couldn't sit still, couldn't stop moving. She called Jackie but it went straight to voicemail like her parents had unplugged their phone. Her mom left for work, asking at least three times if she was okay. She felt bad making her worry, but it was kind of out of her control at this point. Shauna went for another run and found herself at the high school weight room. She walked in and lifted like she never had before for almost two hours before running the 4 miles back to her house. She should've been exhausted and her body probably was, but she didn't feel it. She didn't really feel anything at all. Her mind never stopped moving. She got in her car and drove over to Jackie's. Nobody was home. Her dad's car was gone, all the lights were off and it looked identical to the way it had earlier that morning.

Where the fuck could she be? Did her whole family just pack up and move? Shauna went up to the front door and knocked a few times for good measure. Nobody answered. Shauna sighed, looking through the windows. At this point she just wanted to know if Jackie was okay. She went back to her car and just sat there, waiting to see if Jackie would ever come home. In a strange way, it helped her to feel close to her again. It was a little comforting. Long after the sun went down, Shauna realized Jackie had no intention of sleeping in her bed tonight. She desperately wanted to know where she was, but it was clear she wasn't going to get any answers. When she got home, she realized Nat wasn't there. She figured she had offered the invite, and if Nat had gone home or to the locker room or wherever then it wasn't really any of Shauna's business.

She spent the next week and a half pretty much alone. Nat was around every once in a while and Shauna was glad that she at least had a friend at school, but the silence when she was at home felt so loud. She tried to stick to a routine: school, come home, make dinner to reheat, run to the weight room, lift, run home, eat, go to Jackie's house. She was never there, and Shauna's manic energy never calmed down. She did find that she enjoyed lifting. Nat was right. It helped her to not act as crazy as she wanted to, but still she was getting desperate. She wanted Jackie to just acknowledge that she was there, but she never did. Shauna tried harder and harder to talk to her, and every time Tai got in her way. It was really starting to piss her off. She didn't know what the fuck she was talking about. Shauna knew Jackie would never have just come out and told them the whole story, but now that they had been her friend for two weeks they get to say who can and can't interact with her? Shauna had known Jackie her *whole life* . She still had no idea where she was staying, no idea where her parents were or if something had happened to them. She felt Jackie slipping further and further away from her and it was slowly starting to drive her insane.

There were four days left of high school, and Shauna knew she had to get Jackie to talk to her. She needed Jackie to hear her. She needed to apologize and get Jackie to just say what

she needed to say. Shauna wanted to hear her say everything she thought. She wanted Jackie to hurt her. She needed to feel anything other than empty, which is what it felt like to be ignored by Jackie Taylor.

The final bell rang and Shauna really was just going to drive home and call her again, but then she saw Jackie at her locker. She stopped to just look at her. She fucking missed her. The halls were essentially empty by the time Jackie walked to the bathroom. Van had left, and Shauna realized this was her chance to finally get her alone. She just wanted to apologize. She debated how creepy it was, but her desperation won in the end. She took a deep breath and walked through the door. Jackie was at the sink washing her hands. It was the first time in a long time they had been alone together and Shauna could feel the energy in the air. Jackie dried her hands and refused to even look up at her, trying to walk right past Shauna. She stepped in the way.

"Jackie, please. Come on, we need to talk." Jackie still didn't look at her.

"No, Shauna. We really don't." She tried to push past Shauna again, but Shauna refused to move. She was so close to her it was hard for Shauna to even think. Her eyes darted down to Jackie's lips and she realized how badly she had missed them.

"I've been calling." Jackie rolled her eyes.

"I've been busy." Jackie's big bright eyes finally met hers, and Shauna felt like she was out of breath. They held eye contact for a second before Jackie's eyes darted down to Shauna's lips. She licked them instinctually and watched Jackie's face flush just slightly.

"Where have you been staying?" Shauna asked. She just wanted to make sure she was okay. She had been thinking in circles about what could've caused her family to just abandon her house. "Your whole house looks like you guys just up and left the second everything happened. What's going on?"

Jackie squinted at her, "Why were you at my house, Shauna?" This was starting to get frustrating.

"Because we need to fucking talk!" It came out louder than she had intended it and Jackie froze. Shauna immediately felt like shit for it. She didn't want to yell at her. Why was she such a fucking disaster?

"I read everything you had to say in your little book, and I'm not really interested in hearing any more." Shauna flinched, but refused to back down. She had made it this far, she just wanted some answers. Anything Jackie said would be forward progress at this point, so Shauna had nothing to lose.

"Are you okay, Jackie? You don't answer the phone, it doesn't even fucking ring, all I can do is leave messages that I know you won't hear and then when I stop by your house, no one is ever home. I see you at school and you act like I don't fucking exist—" Jackie's eyes shot up to glare at her in a way that stopped her in her tracks.

"I thought that's what I was already doing, Shauna. Isn't that what you said?" Shauna took a deep breath, trying not to lose her cool.

"I get it, okay? I fucking hate myself for everything, believe me. I ruined everything, I hurt you in the worst way possible, I get it. But I am genuinely fucking worried about you. I

try to find you at school and Tai acts like a private fucking bodyguard, not letting me anywhere near you when all I want to do is just make sure you're okay." She was begging her for anything. She just wanted something from her. She wanted anger or pain or anything other than fucking indifference.

"Don't pretend to care now, Shauna." She felt the urge to reach out and grab her. She wanted to show her how much she cared, but she stopped herself after a step. They were closer now, but Shauna wasn't crossing any boundaries. How could she think Shauna didn't care?

"Do you really think I don't care?" Jackie rolled her eyes and looked away.

"You told me to fuck off Shauna, so I fucked off. Now you decided that you don't actually want that. Actually, now you want me to… what did you say? Instill all my thoughts into you and make you think them too?" Jackie was spitting the words at her and Shauna was hurt but a little relieved too. She did care. It did matter to her. Jackie took a step closer and Shauna's eyes fell to her lips. They were standing nose to nose and she needed to focus on getting her point across. 'Turns out you really can't do anything without my fucking direction, huh?' Shauna was very aware of the effect Jackie's insults had on her. She wanted her. She wanted her so fucking bad. "But wait, I actually never fucking knew you at all, right? Secretly you were just this hateful, jealous—" Shauna fell apart. She closed the distance and kissed her. She melted into the taste of her lip gloss and Jackie moaned in her mouth, which was not helping her to focus on making sure Jackie was okay. She grabbed Shauna's hair hard and ripped at it, resulting in a grunt escaping Shauna's lips. She let Jackie drive them back into the bathroom door and start to feel Shauna's body again. Oh god, this was everything she wanted. She just wanted Jackie's hands fucking everywhere. She spoke into Shauna's mouth, "I can still fucking taste him on you." Jackie put her leg in between Shauna's thighs and pushed into her. She moaned as quietly as she could, but it felt *so* good. Shauna grabbed her ass and pulled her in closer. Jackie pulled back and pushed her hand down her shorts. She immediately pushed her fingers inside of her. Shauna tried not to scream. She wanted Jackie to know how badly she was wanted.

"This is all I can ever think about, Jackie." Jackie started to fuck her harder. Pushing almost violently in and out of her. She pulled so hard at her hair that Shauna felt like she was going to pull it completely off her head. Shauna was going to cum already. She was so close and probably moaning a little too loud, but she wasn't in control. Jackie was in control, and Shauna fucking LOVED it. "This is all I want, it's all I want." She felt her muscles start to tense and her eyes roll back, preparing finally for some kind of release, but Jackie ripped her hand away. Shauna could've cried. She looked at Jackie, who locked eyes with her and licked her fingers clean. Shauna looked to her for some kind of explanation.

"You had it, now you don't." Shauna grabbed for Jackie's hand, now more panicked than she ever had been.

"Fuck Jackie, no… please." Shauna grabbed at her arms and then her hips. Anything to keep her in front of her.

"Don't fucking touch me. Let me through." Jackie screamed it at her, but Shauna didn't believe she meant it. She reached out and grabbed her arms, pulling her closer into a hug, but Jackie shoved her hard enough to knock her off balance. "Fucking let me through, Shauna."

She fell backwards into the door just as it was starting to open from the other side. Van walked in and she looked disgusted. To someone who didn't know the way Jackie had just fucked her, she probably looked borderline fucking abusive.

"Oh fuck no. Shauna, you need to leave her the fuck alone." Van grabbed Jackie's arm and pulled her out of the bathroom. Shauna had nothing to say. Jackie knew what happened. Shauna didn't give a fuck about what Van or Tai thought about her. She didn't need to defend herself, so she just watched Jackie walk away from her. She didn't even spare her a glance.

Shauna didn't even bother going home. She went straight to the weight room and stayed there for hours, unable to think, unable to process anything that had happened. When she got done she went to the locker room to shower and it all hit her like a truck. The steam from the hot water made it hard to breathe. Shauna felt her breaths get shallow and her vision started to blur. She got out of the shower, wrapped herself on a towel and sunk to the floor beneath what used to be her locker. She sat there and cried for hours. Jackie had touched her. She had wanted her and sheand been so mean to her and Shauna *still* wanted her. She didn't care. She would be happy spending the rest of her life taking whatever abuse Jackie deemed necessary. She wanted her to scream and cry and fucking hit her if she wanted to. She didn't care. Shauna was going to spend the rest of her life wanting her, and Jackie couldn't even look at her. It hurt Jackie to even speak to her. Shauna was really crying now. She tried to stop herself from hyperventilating, but she was so upset that it felt like her heart was being squeezed in her chest. She heard the door open but couldn't stop herself. She was sobbing and having an anxiety attack all at once.

"Oh my god," Nat said. She jogged over and sat down next to Shauna on the floor, wrapping her arms around her and slowly rocking back and forth with her. "What happened? How long have you been here?"

Shauna cried harder at the feeling of comfort. She rested her head on Nat's shoulder and unleashed all of the pain she had been fostering over the past few weeks or even months. She screamed and shook and cried for longer than anybody probably should be able to. Nat shushed her gently and just held her until she calmed down. When slowly started to let her go, Shauna sat up a bit. "Shauna, honey it's like 8. When did you get here?"

"I never left. 3, I guess." Nat's jaw dropped.

"Aren't you cold?" Shauna looked down and couldn't tell if she was shivering or just shaking. She shrugged her shoulders and Nat helped her stand up. "Where are your clothes?" She didn't realize how exposed she had been. Her towel had fallen open, and while she was covered for the most part, Nat still saw more of her than either of them probably would've liked. She was suddenly so embarrassed that Nat had seen her like this. Not only was she crying like a toddler, but she was so upset she didn't even have the decency to cover herself.

"I— I didn't have clean ones. I was gonna change back into my old ones."

Nat nodded and ran to Coach's office, coming back with a pair of sweats and a big shirt. "Take these and get changed okay? Then we'll talk."

Shauna nodded and got dressed, setting her towel down on the bench. Now that she had calmed down, she felt so fucking stupid. She was so embarrassed. "I'm so sorry. Please

don't worry. I promise I'm fine."

"Bullshit." Nat shook her head and sat down in front of Shauna on the bench. "I've been trying to give you space, you know. I thought if I wasn't breathing down your neck you'd talk about stuff. Now that I found you sobbing naked on the floor the offer is off the table. What happened?"

Shauna took a deep breath. "She wouldn't look at me. She wouldn't talk to me. She's never at her house and her parents aren't there either. I have no idea where she's staying or if something happened. I've called and left voicemails, but she has no interest in any kind of communication. I finally got her alone and she… she fucked me and then she left me. I know that I deserve this. I know that I did it to myself. I just— I really think I'm going to lose her. I really think she's never going to speak to me again."

Nat sighed, "She's not just going to never speak to you again. If she fucked you then there's still something there. She's at least going to have questions. You just have to be there when she's ready." Shauna looked at her. She felt so guilty, because she looked genuinely worried.

"I'm sorry that I scared you." Nat smiled at her and grabbed her hand.

"You've been scaring me, Shipman. It's been building up for a while. Maybe we can try to move forward?" Shauna nodded. Nat took her hand back and they sat in silence for a minute.

Shauna finally laughed at herself. What a fucking disaster she was. "This was all a little embarrassing…" Nat laughed

"It's really not. Please don't stress about it."

They sat quietly for a while until Shauna couldn't take the silence, "What have you been up to?" Shauna saw Nat look down and smile discreetly. She was intrigued and also relieved that there was something new to diverge from this whole situation. "Something happened. Thank god. Distract me. I need some kind of gossip to make me feel less crazy please."

"I don't know if I've got anything quite like this I don't think. But… I did kind of use you for inspiration. I've been hanging out with Lottie the last couple days."

"Really? Like… *hanging out?*" Nat looked down and smiled.

"I don't know. Maybe." Shauna grinned at her.

"I'm happy for you." They sat in silence for a minute before Nat spoke again.

"She's staying at Lottie's. I'm not telling you anything more than that. She's gonna talk to you, just… try not to fuck her when she does."

Shauna laughed, "Probably good advice, yeah." Staying at Lottie's. Still didn't explain where her parents went or if she was okay, but at least she wasn't like at Jeff's house or on the street or something.

"Let's get you home, Shipman. I've been missing that fully functional kitchen you advertised." They walked to Shauna's car and drove home. Nat made her mac and cheese for dinner and they watched Can't Buy Me Love, which Nat pretended to hate.

Shauna took some melatonin and passed out at like 11, avoiding the endless thought spirals that were pretty much guaranteed otherwise.

Chapter 11

The next day, Shauna got back to her routine. Drive to school, smoke with Nat, go to classes, stare at Jackie, make dinner, run to the weight room, run home. This time, Nat did it all with her except for the exercise part. Her and Lottie disappeared to go for a walk for a few hours instead. When Shauna told her she was gonna go sit outside Jackie's house, Nat seemed kind of concerned. Apparently she wasn't a fan of Shauna's new routine.

"You've been there every night? What the fuck Shauna that's weird."

"I mean it's not like anybody *knows* I'm there. I just want to be there if she gets home, you know?"

"No. I don't know. It seems creepy."

"Well, I'm going. Call the cops if you must." Nat laughed.

"I'll be here. Eating all your snacks."

"Sounds good. Have fun," Shauna said as she walked out the door. Nobody was home, again. She sat there just wondering what Jackie was thinking about. She wanted to know what she had been up to. She wanted to know why she wouldn't go home or if she was okay. Knowing she was at Lottie's gave her a little piece of mind, but not much. Shauna was snapped out of her own head at the sound of Van's fucked up muffler. She watched her pull the car into Jackie's driveway and sat up straight in her seat. Jackie got out of the car, waving goodbye before unlocking her front door and walking inside, disappearing behind it. Shauna froze. This was the plan, right? Sit here until she comes home and then knock on the door? Fuck. Shauna waited until Van pulled off and then she slowly walked up to Jackie's door. Her stomach did somersaults the whole day up the driveway. She had no fucking clue what she was going to say. She knocked on the door and waited, anxiety bubbling higher and higher with every passing second at the thought of seeing Jackie on the other side. The door swung open, "Van bro…" Jackie smiled and then it fell off of her face. "What are you doing here? Have you been fucking stalking me?"

Shauna reached out instinctually, "Jackie, no. I'm not stalking you. I— well I guess I can kind of see how it might kind of be stalking, but I've been so worried about you!"

"You've just been sitting outside my house? It's so late Shauna what the fuck?" Shauna took a deep breath.

"Will you just let me in? Please?" She looked at Jackie and realized she didn't know what she was going to do if she turned her away. Standing in front of her now, she realized how fucking badly she needed to talk to her. Jackie took a deep breath and let her through. Shauna looked around Jackie's house for any sign of what was going on. She looked at the phone and noticed it was plugged in. "Oh, you plugged the phone back in. Did you listen to my messages?"

Jackie crossed her arms over her chest. “No. You can say it to my face. Say whatever you need to say.”

“Really?” She turned the phone back on and didn’t care enough to listen to what she said?

“Yes, Shauna. Say what you need to and then you can fuck off and never see me again.” Shauna felt her eyes start to burn and her stomach sunk. Ouch. She took a deep breath. Jackie wasn’t even looking at her. This might actually be it.

“I’m sorry, Jackie. I don’t really fully understand why I did it.” Shauna didn’t even know if she was into men. She didn’t know why she picked Jeff that first night. She didn’t know what any of it really meant to her. “I wish I knew what to say, I’ve been trying to figure out what to say for months… how to tell you. I just don’t know, Jackie.” Shauna watched Jackie stare at her and then kind of smile. She looked entertained and that scared her a little bit.

“Seriously? That’s it?” She met her eyes and Shauna froze. They were so bright and they were *burning* . “Are you fucking kidding me?” Shauna snapped out of it.

What did she want her to say? Shauna was sure she wouldn’t want to know the details. “I don’t know how much you want to know.” Jackie was so upset. She was so hurt, and Shauna just wanted to curl up into a ball and cry. Jackie’s eyes softened for a minute before they looked around like she just realized something. She was angry again.

“How fucking long has this been going on? Did you say you wanted to tell me for MONTHS?” Shauna’s eyes dropped to the floor. God this conversation she had been dying for fucking SUCKED. She looked back up but still couldn’t meet Jackie’s eyes.

“Like 2 or 3 months. It started at the party Mari threw for her 18th birthday. Afterwards, I guess, technically.” A tear fell from Jackie’s eyes and Shauna felt herself get choked up. ‘I will tell you whatever you want to know. I never should have done it, and I never should have lied, but I won’t now. I know you hate me, I know you want nothing to do with me, but you deserve to know… if you want to.’ Jackie stood there staring at her, but she didn’t respond. “Do you want to know?”

Jackie’s voice was shaky, “Yes.”

“Everything?” Shauna wasn’t sure what everything was. She knew she couldn’t sit here and just tell her detail for detail about every time she fucked somebody else.

“I think so.” It was quiet, and unsure. Maybe Jackie didn’t know what everything meant either.

“Then please, Jackie. Ask me anything” Shauna was pretty much begging, and honestly if she asked Shauna would’ve gotten on her knees and begged harder. She looked down at the ground, unable to look at Shauna and it broke her heart.

“How did it start?”

“He dropped you off at your house after Mari’s 18th birthday party, and I was drunk and high.” Jackie’s brow furrowed and Shauna bit down hard on her lip to get herself to finish the explanation. She promised to be honest. “I started it, and he didn’t try to stop me.”

Jackie laughed an empty, hollow laugh that Shauna had never heard before, “Get the fuck out of my house, Shauna.” She turned away and started walking up the stairs. Shauna

jumped in front of her and grabbed her arms.

"No, Jackie. Let's just do this. Let's just say what needs to be said and we can move forward at least. I can't keep trying to chase you down hoping that one day you might hear me or even fucking see me."

Jackie leaned in and started screaming, "I can't fucking do this. I can't hear about how you fucked somebody else. I can't hear about the fact that you fucked MY BOYFRIEND, specifically to hurt me. You betrayed me in every possible way. I fucking LOVED you Shauna." Past tense, again. Shauna knew she deserved this. She knew that Jackie needed it. She didn't want to, but her body shut itself down and just let her brain take this beating. 'I know you know that. I spent my whole life trying to love Jeff the way I loved you, and it was so easy for you to not only fuck him, but to hurt and betray me in the process. Do you understand how hard it was for me to pretend to want him and not you? But not you, Shauna! Not you! You had no fucking issue wanting him.' Jackie was crying and Shauna felt like she couldn't even hear her. It was all muffled. She was just watching from the outside looking in. "You fucked him WHILE WE WERE TOGETHER? While we were doing whatever the fuck we had been doing? Was it all just some fucking game to you?" Jackie leaned in and started beating on her chest, desperately trying to get her to react.

Shauna took a deep breath and spoke quietly, "Yes. I did. I shouldn't have, but I did. I know. I would do anything to take it back, Jackie. I really would." Jackie pushed her hard enough to make her stumble backwards.

"I fucking hate you." Shauna felt like she was getting stabbed in the chest over and over again, but Jackie needed this. She needed to let it out more than Shauna needed to feel better.

"I know. What else?"

"You are evil, and heartless, and I don't even understand why the fuck you're here."

Shauna looked up at her, her voice wavering. "I've always been here. I couldn't just not be here, Jax. I've been here every night for the last 2 weeks…" Shauna felt a tear start to fall down her face. "Where did you go? Where are your parents?" It came out as a whisper. She needed any kind of connection. She wanted Jackie to open up to her. She wanted her so badly.

"No, Shauna. This isn't going to go back to normal. You don't get to know any of that anymore. You need to fucking go home, go to Jeff's house, go fucking anywhere but here. Please." Jackie broke down at the last word and something very foundational within Shauna shattered.

"You know that I don't love him, Jax. I don't want him."

"I don't know anything about you Shauna. Please just leave me alone." Jackie turned away from her and started to walk away. Shauna felt her whole chest start to shrink in on itself. She just could've told her she loved her. She could've just told her months ago and none of this would have ever happened.

"Jackie! I did this, I know that I did this, but you—"

Jackie whipped her head back around. The pure anger in her eyes stopped Shauna in her tracks. "No. Absolutely fucking not Shauna. I read those pages, I know what you think of

me, that's fine. Hate me, that's fine. But you are NOT the victim in this, so don't you fucking dare try to justify this with whatever you think I did to make you do it. You need to fucking leave. NOW." Her voice was steady and loud. Shauna knew she wasn't fucking around. She didn't want her here anymore, but Shauna couldn't just leave her.

"I'm not trying—"

"You're not trying to what? Hurt me?" Jackie cut her off again, she wasn't ready for this. "You already fucking did, and I am telling you right now, I HATE you for it. I don't ever want to speak to you again, I don't ever want to fucking look at you again, Shauna. Leave. Go home." It felt very final. It felt very real. Shauna started to cry silently, not able to take her eyes away from Jackie. She tried to push through again, and Shauna let her, too weak to do anything else. She watched Jackie walk up the stairs and out of sight, then almost comatose walked back to the car. She drove herself home and then walked directly up to her bedroom, taking a melatonin and falling asleep without even addressing Nat on the couch.

Chapter 12

Her alarm went off at 6 and she saw Nat passed out in her desk chair. Had she slept there all night? She woke up at essentially the same time and looked at her with worry. "Did you sleep in the chair?"

"Yeah. It was comfier than I thought it'd be, honestly." Nat stood up and stretched.

"Well… why?"

Nat looked at Shauna and rolled her eyes, "You were like completely unresponsive last night. You walked through the door and it was like you couldn't even fucking hear me. I gave you like half an hour before I came to check on you and were passed out with melatonin on the nightstand. You scared the fuck out of me." Shauna sighed. Yeah that probably would be concerning. The night came rushing back to her. Jackie loved her. Past tense. She was pretending to want Jeff, she never wanted to fuck him. Shauna felt sick. She could've fucking *had* her. Jackie confirmed every bad thought Shauna had about herself. She was evil, she was heartless and Jackie was going to hate her for the rest of her life. She looked back up at Nat who had tears in her eyes. Had Shauna really scared her that badly?

"I'm sorry. It wasn't like that… I just needed to go to sleep." Nat didn't respond, she just stared at her trying to figure out if she was being honest.

"I get that's your girl or whatever, but if you kill yourself over Jackie fucking Taylor of all people I swear to god…" Shauna nodded. She knew that wasn't what it was. She didn't want that, but it felt like if she were to do it… doing it over Jackie would make the most sense in the world. She looked up at Nat and realized that maybe there was more to this than just the melatonin on the nightstand. Maybe Nat had been through more shit than Shauna realized.

"I'm not going to kill myself, Nat. I'm sorry." Nat took a deep breath and sat down next to Shauna in bed. They sat in silence for a minute before Shauna decided Nat probably deserved an explanation. "She went home. I knocked, we talked. I didn't handle it well. Kind of dissociated through the whole thing."

"What did she say?"

"Just all the things I've been thinking, you know. I'm evil and heartless and she fucking hates me." Shauna sighed, 'she told me that she never wanted Jeff. She told me she was pretending to want him when she actually wanted me the whole time, which was something that I never thought was possible. So now I'm just realizing what I could have had and realizing also what I fucking threw away.' Nat nodded at her, not knowing what to say. "She didn't react well to finding out I came on to Jeff. It all kind of went downhill from there. She kicked me out." Nat's eyes went wide.

"I'm trying not to pry but like… I feel like I'm missing a lot of important context here. What was going on between you two?"

Shauna took a deep breath and looked up at her. “I think I only got with Jeff because he had her lipstick smeared on his neck.” Nat’s jaw dropped and she laughed, so Shauna continued. Might as well just do it all at once. “Or her perfume, or hickies or whatever else. And then I stopped because it was wrong and then her and I started to… you know. I realized that I was like in love with her, but she wouldn’t talk about it. We would fuck and then she’d immediately talk about how she wanted to fuck Jeff. I was going crazy and Jeff kept calling so I slept with him again, which I immediately regretted—” Nat’s laugh cut her off.

“I’m sorry… I just— you are so messy.” She didn’t say it in a judgy way or a mean way, but just like she was accepting Shauna for what she had done. She didn’t hate her for it. It was kind of shocking. “Continue, continue. Please.”

“I realized that I did actually fucking hate him, which I already knew and I tried to just bury all of it. Jackie ended up fucking him and then coming over right after to fuck me. It was all just like super painful and also fucking amazing. I realized how bad I fucked everything up and I realized that Jackie did actually want me and it was good for a couple weeks, but then she read my journal and… well you know the rest at this point.”

Nat sighed and looked out the window, trying to process the amount of information Shauna just dumped on her. “I’m sorry. That’s a lot. Makes a lot more sense honestly than you wanting Jeff.” Shauna laughed a little and sat just processing. Saying it all out loud… it was a lot. They were a lot.

“Hey, are you okay? I know you’ve got a lot of shit going on too.” Nat nodded a little unconvincingly. “It’s just… I really didn’t mean to scare you with the pills. I’m sorry.”

“I’m okay. I guess I can overreact a little when it comes to that stuff. I’m just glad you’re okay.” Shauna had no clue what Nat meant or why she’d be sensitive to it, but she was a little worried. Was Nat thinking about killing herself? She couldn’t just ask outright, Nat would probably just run.

“Will you stay a while? Please. You don’t have to sleep at school.”

Nat shook her head, “I don’t know. You guys have done enough, seriously. Did you know your mom came home last night, saw that I was back and baked a lasagna for me just in case I wasn’t back for a while? I already feel like shit for leeching off of you guys for so long.” Shauna smiled. That was her mom. Worked 15 hours and came home to cook for somebody who needed it.

“She enjoys keeping people fed, really. You’re probably helping us more than we’re helping you. She’s feeling the Jackie stuff too.” Nat still looked unsure, “You can invite Lottie over here. Since Jackie’s over there all the time. You won’t have to go walk in the woods.”

Nat smiled a little. “Really? You wouldn’t mind?”

Shauna shook her head. There was no reason they couldn’t be happy just because Shauna was miserable. “I won’t even interrogate her or anything. The house is empty more often than not. We wouldn’t mind.” Nat looked down and nodded.

“Okay. Thank you.” Shauna got out of bed and threw a flannel over the t-shirt and shorts she had slept in. Nat looked up at her a little confused, “We’re going to school?”

"I gotta see if she's okay. She seemed pretty upset."

"You are fucking crazy." Shauna grabbed her backpack and walked out of the room.

"I told you, I'm fine," Shauna joked. Nat laughed and they walked out the front door.

Shauna spent the school day looking everywhere for Jackie. She hadn't showed up. Tai and Van had skipped too. Shauna really started to panic. What if something had happened after she left? What would be so bad that Tai and Van had to skip too? Maybe she was just really that done with Shauna. Maybe she didn't want to see her. At the end of the day Shauna found Lottie.

"Lot, listen. I know you probably hate me. I just… Why isn't she here? Is she okay?" Lottie looked around her before letting her eyes settle on Shauna.

"I don't know why she didn't show. I haven't heard from them." That did not help Shauna's worry. Lottie sighed and reached out to touch her arm, "I don't hate you. I might not understand it, but I don't hate you." She offered Shauna a small smile and walked past her. Shauna ended up driving her and Nat home before running back to school and lifting. She didn't go by Jackie's house that night, regardless how much she wanted to. She got back to Nat and Lottie asleep together on the couch. It was sweet. They were all cuddled up and Nat had a little smile on her face. Shauna walked into the kitchen and found a note from her mom.

Got called in sorry girls. Couldn't make dinner. Love, mom.

Shauna smiled a little. It had kind of been a while since she had seen her. She missed her. Shauna took a deep breath and started to make pasta. She assumed Nat and Lottie hadn't eaten, so she made spaghetti. It was quick and easy. She walked two plates into the living room, setting them on the coffee table before walking upstairs with her own. She ate in silence, staring at what felt like thousands of pictures of Jackie that surrounded her. It was only 9, but she took a pill anyway. She just wanted to be asleep. She didn't want to journal, she didn't want to think or read or write or watch tv. She just wanted to sink into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The next morning when she woke up to her alarm, she groaned and turned it off. If Jackie wasn't going to be there then why the fuck did Shauna want to go? She had pretty much finished high school anyway, and she had been accepted into Brown. What did she need Wiskayok High for? She slept all morning and laid in bed all afternoon. Around 3 Nat came in and put *Live Through This* into her CD player, turning the volume up as high as it would go. "God, Nat. Seriously?"

"Yes! Seriously. You don't have to go to school but if the Shauna I've seen for the past few weeks is a physically exhausted, mentally and emotionally regulated via journal version of you, I'm terrified to find out what you're like if you don't do any of those things." Shauna groaned and Nat opened her curtains, letting in way too much light. She relented and slowly sat up.

"Did you go?"

"Yes. I'm trying to actually get my diploma." Shauna looked at her. She wondered if Jackie went. She missed her. She missed her even if she had just been staring at her from

across the room for the past few weeks. Nat sighed. “She wasn’t there.”

“I wasn’t gonna ask,” Shauna said, wanting Nat to know she wasn’t *that* desperate.

“But you wanted to know.” Shauna shrugged.

“You need to go for a run. Out of bed, Shipman.” Nat turned and walked out of the room, leaving the CD player on to make sure she didn’t go back to bed. Shauna sighed and stood up, throwing on a sports bra and a pair of shorts and walking downstairs. Nat had set out a plate of toast and eggs for her. She shoveled some eggs onto the toast and took a bite as she peered around the corner into the living room to see Nat and Lottie on the couch. She laughed.

“If you wanted the house to yourself you could’ve just said that.” Nat laughed and threw a pillow at her.

“Hey, Shauna. How are you?” Lottie asked, ignoring the comment all together.

Shauna paused, unsure of how to answer a question whose answer seemed pretty obvious. “Peachy, Lot. Thanks for asking.” Lottie smiled and Shauna was grateful that she took it as a joke. She hadn’t meant it to be mean, but like… she wasn’t gonna just say that she was a fucking mess. “Thank you guys… for the food.” Lottie smiled and nodded and Nat ignored her.

She went on her run, lifted, and ran home to find chicken and rice on the kitchen table. Her mom wasn’t home, and Shauna just didn’t feel like Nat was capable of it. “Lot, you know how to cook?”

“Hey! How’d you know I didn’t do it?” Nat asked.

“You almost fucked up the mac and cheese the other night.” Lottie laughed and Nat waved them both off, grabbing a couple plates.

“Yeah. Lots of free time you know?” Lottie said. Shauna nodded and sat down.

“Thank you. For cooking.” Shauna said without looking up. It was hard knowing that Lottie knew how she was. It was hard knowing that she had to have more information now.

“No problem. Thank you for letting me hang out here.” Shauna looked up at Nat, trying to figure out how bad it would be if she asked a question.

“Just ask it for fucks sake,” Nat said with an eye roll. She turned to Lottie, “You don’t have to answer but Shauna keeping shit in is a recipe for disaster.”

Lottie laughed and Shauna took it as permission, “Does she know you’re here?”

Lottie looked at Nat before answering, “No. I don’t think it would be helpful, and I don’t think it makes me any worse of a friend to her.” Shauna nodded, wanting to ask more but knowing she shouldn’t. “She’s processing. That’s all.” Shauna nodded again and dropped it.

The next day she did the same thing. She was uninterested in school, and she figured as long as she did some exercise and journaled she didn’t need to go. When Nat and Lottie got back from school they were shocked to see Shauna up and moving.

“Going for a run?” Nat asked.

"Yep. Be back later, okay?" Lottie nodded and Shauna went about her routine. She was running up the street when she saw Tai's car in front of her house. It had to have been Jackie. Shauna slowed down and ducked into the trees a bit, wanting to see if she was going to try to talk to her. Her mom was home. Maybe Jackie didn't want to do it in front of her. Before she could even entertain the idea Tai pulled off and they disappeared around the next corner. Shauna walked the rest of the way up the street. What did Jackie want to say? What was she looking for? Shauna needed to know. She needed to know so fucking badly. When she got inside, she realized Nat and Lottie had left. Shauna slowly cracked her mom's bedroom door and saw that she was already fast asleep. She shut it quietly and walked up to her bedroom, grabbing her journal and opening it to a fresh page.

Maybe she's not done. Maybe she has more to say. Maybe Jackie wanted to talk to me. What was she going to say? Was she going to chew me out again? Was she gonna tell me she wanted to just put it behind us? Was she going to tell me that she loves me and can't go to college hating me? This is going to fucking tear me apart. I mean, do I just go over there and ask? Do I just let her come to me? What if she never fucking does and I spend the rest of my life wondering?

She turned around to the sound of Nat knocking on her open door. "Hey… you good?"

"Yeah. Um… Jackie was sitting outside earlier in Tai's car." Nat raised her eyebrows, and Shauna was a little shocked at how quickly she offered up information too. Somehow she didn't feel so closed off around Nat. She knew that she really cared and really did want to know. She wasn't asking as a formality, and Shauna felt like she couldn't lie to her. "She didn't knock or anything and they left before they saw me."

"How are we doing with that?" Nat asked, sitting down gently on her bed.

"It just felt like she came for a reason. She wanted to say something right?"

"Well don't you think she would've went to the door if she wanted to say something?"

"My mom's car was here. Maybe she didn't want to say anything in front of her." Nat looked at her, knowing there was more. "Maybe I should just go over there. I know I've been like giving her space or whatever but what if she wanted to talk?"

Nat sighed, "Maybe you can go over there tomorrow. I mean if you're both skipping school it's not like there's anything better for you to do." Shauna looked at the ground. She wanted answers now. "Just… not tonight, okay? Let's just sleep on it." Shauna nodded.

"How are things with Lottie?" She needed a change of conversation. She needed something else to focus on.

"They're good. They're… really good." Shauna smiled and Nat started laughing.

"Look at you all smitten," Shauna joked. Nat rolled her eyes. "Seriously, have you ever been in like a real relationship before?"

Nat's brow furrowed, "Um… no not exactly I guess. Huh…"

"So *THE* Natalie Scartorccio is settling down? Wowww." Natalie batted playfully at her arm, trying to contain her very obvious excitement.

"Shut up, Shipman. Go to bed." Nat turned and walked out of the room, apparently very uncomfortable with all the relationship talk. Shauna laughed as she shut the door behind her. She looked down at her journal and felt her smile fade.

I'm gonna love her forever. I'm actually just fucked for the rest of my life. I need her. I don't even know where she ends and I begin. She's fucking everything, and she won't even look at me. There is nothing worse than the way I feel about myself. There is nothing worse than the way I'm going to feel for the rest of my life. I need her and she's just… gone.

Shauna took a deep breath and laid down in bed. She thought about taking a pill, but decided she wanted to feel it. She wanted to feel how awful life without Jackie was. She wanted to make herself fucking feel it. She laid there in bed until her mom left for work at 4 am. She sighed and took the pill, finally giving in. She knew that it wasn't going to happen on its own. Sleep might never come again.

Chapter 13

She woke up at 12:15 and immediately got in her car. She couldn't sit on it anymore. She needed to talk to Jackie. She needed to know what she wanted to say. She drove to her house and knocked on the door. Nobody answered. Shauna looked through the windows and there were no lights on and no signs of movement. She wasn't there. Shauna sighed and leaned against her door. Where could she be? She's not going to school and she's not at home… What else was there? Eventually, Shauna gave up on it and drove home. It all ate away at her. She obviously wanted to talk, she obviously had questions, and Shauna wanted to answer them so badly, but she was just so far away.

She started her workouts a little early and instead of running to the school, she ran to Lottie's house, which was two miles further. It didn't look like anybody was at the Matthews' place either. She ran home, trying with everything in her to clear her mind. 12 miles would typically do that for a person, but not Shauna. Not today. She got home and took a shower, made dinner ridiculously early in the day and put it in the fridge, and then deep cleaned the whole house. She mopped, vacuumed, dusted and even washed the couch cushions. Nat came home about half way through her process, when the house looked its worst before she could put it back together.

"What the fuck happened in here?" She asked, stepping over the naked couch cushions that Shauna had thrown on the floor.

"Oh… hey. Just cleaning up a little bit."

"Yeah, no. Looks really organized." Nat said with sarcasm. Shauna shot a glare at her and started to put the now clean cushion covers back on. "What's wrong with you?"

Shauna laughed. What was wrong with her? "Did Jackie go to school today?"

"No. Did you think she would?" Nat grabbed a cushion cover and started to help out.

"She wasn't at her house. I was gonna ask what she stopped by for, but she wasn't home." Nat nodded and sighed.

"I know that you're just kind of like waiting for her to talk to you again, and I do think that she will…" Shauna looked up at her. There was a but coming. Nat met her eyes and held her gaze as she continued, "I just— you do know that it's probably not just going to like go back to normal, right?" Shauna felt the energy she had been fostering all day leave her body.

"I know. Yeah. I just… I'm not really that far ahead yet. I don't know. I just need to have the conversation with her, then maybe I can get my head there." Nat nodded slowly.

"Well… there is a party tonight." Shauna rolled her eyes.

"I'm not going to one of those fucking parties so that I can watch her ignore me and makeout with Carson." Nat looked confused.

"Carson?"

"Yeah. Saw them together a couple weeks ago."

Nat shook her head and continued, "Anyways… irrelevant. I'm saying you want to talk to her and you can't track her down. The girl is not going to miss the last party of senior year." Shauna thought about it. It would be relatively public, so they wouldn't be able to scream at each other or end up having sex, but also since it was public she didn't want the whole school to watch their very heated fight and get the wrong idea. She wasn't sure, but in reality Jackie could very easily just slip away now. She could disappear and Shauna could never see her again. This could be her last chance. "I'll drive so you can drink." Nat offered. Shauna thought about it for another minute before eventually caving.

"Okay. Deal. I'll go." Nat smiled and went back to the couch cushions, placing them back where they went.

"Okay. We gotta put this place back together before your mom gets home, though. This is crazy." Shauna laughed and they spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning the place up. Shauna tried not to let herself get too freaked out or excited about seeing Jackie. She knew how badly she missed her, but she also knew that she had completely shut down last time. It had been unfair to Jackie. Shauna really didn't want to do that this time. She wanted to be able to have an emotional conversation with her where she could actually be honest about the way she felt. She went for another short run before getting in the shower and trying to figure out what to wear.

She laid out a few options, nervous to be seen by Jackie again. She wanted the girl to look at her. She wanted to make her realize that she still wanted her. She landed on the red dress that Jackie had always loved. Shauna was going to just throw it on over her usual boyshort underwear and bra, but when she went in the drawer her eyes landed somewhere else. She had bought a matching set a few months back. It was a black thong and bra that she had never really had a reason to wear. She knew the intention wasn't to have sex, but if it made her feel more confident then so be it. She put them on and admired herself in the mirror. Jackie would like this, wouldn't she? Shauna threw her dress on and walked downstairs to see Nat wearing her typical leather jacket and jeans. She saw Shauna and raised her eyebrows.

"You look nice for somebody that didn't want to even go," Nat joked.

"She likes this dress." Shauna stated, refusing to meet her eyes. Before Nat could bring up the whole not fucking her and having a real conversation thing, Shauna continued. "I'm sure Lot's gonna love that leather jacket you wear every day." Nat rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, you know. She does actually like my leather jacket." Shauna laughed. It was late now and Shauna knew that she was procrastinating, but she needed to be buzzed before she walked in if she was gonna make a real effort to be vulnerable. They didn't even leave Shauna's house until midnight.

It was strange and a little unsettling to see Nat in the driver's seat, but Shauna was glad that she didn't have to be sober. If she had been she might not have even worked up the courage to go. It took about 3 minutes for Shauna to realize the route they were taking. "Who's throwing this party?" Shauna asked.

"Well… I think Van, technically." Shauna stared into the side of her head.

"At whose house, Nat?"

Nat sighed and turned to look at her, "Jackie's."

"What the fuck! I can't just show up to her house."

"It's a party, Shipman. Why not?"

"She invited me?"

"Well… technically Lottie invited me, but she never said you couldn't go too." Shauna rolled her eyes. They needed to turn around.

"We both know I wasn't fucking invited." Nat pulled onto Jackie's street and parked the car.

"You want to talk to her, so I brought you here to talk to her. I knew you wouldn't come if I told you where it was, and you need to just fucking talk to her."

"I only agreed to come because it would be like neutral turf!" Shauna looked at Jackie's house. Fuck. She was right there. She was just inside the door, and all Shauna wanted to do was go find her.

"You want to leave, then?" Shauna glared at her and opened the door. Nat grinned and followed her out.

"Lottie's gonna fucking kill you."

"Probably, yeah," Nat looked down like she was upset about it.

"Why are we doing this? Seriously I don't want to fuck that up for you guys."

"Because you need to talk. Lottie knows that. She'll get over it." Shauna sighed and paused at Jackie's front door. Nat rolled her eyes, reaching around to open it. "Inside. Go."

Shauna crossed the threshold and Tai was on her almost immediately. "What the FUCK are you doing here, Shauna. Seriously? You think anybody wants you here right now?" She had her finger in Shauna's face and was trying to back her out of the door. Nat pushed her back gently and it looked like Tai was gonna snap.

"I want her here." Nat stared hard at Tai and it felt like something very bad was going to happen. Tai laughed and started to respond, taking another step closer when Lottie showed up behind her and grabbed her arm, pulling her back to say something too quiet for Shauna to make out. Lottie looked up at Shauna and then over to Nat. She definitely didn't seem excited by their surprise appearance. Nat turned around.

"Let's just go, Nat. Come on." Shauna walked out the front door and Nat followed her.

"We're already here. She knows you came. There's no point turning back now." Shauna sighed. This sucked. Nobody fucking wanted her here, all she was doing was ruining Jackie's party. "Come on. Let's smoke and calm down a bit and if you still want to leave then we can just go." Shauna looked at her and she knew Nat wasn't going to take no for an answer. She nodded and followed Nat out back. She was trying to calm down, but her hands were shaking and she was more nauseous than she cared to admit. Nat lit a joint and handed it to her. Shauna was grateful for the way it seemed to settle her after a couple minutes.

“Feeling any better?” Nat asked. Shauna nodded and Nat raised her eyebrows, “That’s good. She’s walking up behind you right now by the way.” Shauna felt her heart drop in her stomach and she turned around right as Jackie started yelling.

“Are you fucking serious? I tell you I never want to see you again so you show up at my house?” Actually she had a few times now. Jackie looked fucking beautiful and she was staring directly into Shauna’s soul. She couldn’t even find the words to respond to her. She just took a deep breath and admired her little skirt and the way her neck was on display in her low cut shirt. Shauna opened her mouth but nothing really came out.

Luckily, Nat cut her off, “It’s a house party on the last day of school, Taylor. You wanted the entire senior class except for Shauna here?”

Jackie turned and glared at her, “Yes, actually, and I wouldn’t have minded if you had stayed home either.” Nat took a step forward, apparently acting like Shauna’s personal bodyguard tonight. Shauna stopped her.

“Nat, it’s okay. I told you this wasn’t a good idea,” Shauna grabbed Jackie’s wrist and gently pulled her out of Nat’s earshot. She was just gonna apologize and then they could just leave. Jackie clearly didn’t have anything she wanted to say. “Jackie, listen, I didn’t even know we were coming here until we pulled onto your street. I can go, really. I didn’t mean to ruin your night.” Jackie recoiled and Shauna was now very aware of how drunk she was.

“My night? You didn’t mean to ruin my night? You ruined my life Shauna.” She had tears in her eyes and Shauna’s heart broke all over again just looking at her. Jackie had more to say. She needed to just get all of the awful things out of her system. Shauna could see it all waiting to boil over.

“Jackie…” It came out a lot softer than Shauna had intended. Her voice was already failing her. “If it makes you feel any better, I ruined mine too.”

“Why haven’t you been at school?” Jackie asked. Shauna smiled a little. She had been checking in.

“Why haven’t you?” Jackie stared at her but didn’t give her an answer, “I know you were at my house, Jax. I thought you might have wanted to talk, but saw my mom’s car. That’s the only reason I walked through the door. I just thought you wanted something…” Shauna knew she had come for more than that. She wanted to be in the same room again. She wanted Jackie to look at her again. She just wanted to hear her voice again, but she didn’t deserve any of that. Jackie deserved the opportunity to say and ask what she wanted to. That had to trump everything else that Shauna wanted. Jackie looked down and Shauna knew it was time. She wasn’t going to talk now. Not here. “It was dumb. I’m sorry, I should have known.” Shauna took one last look at her and took a deep breath before turning and walking back toward Nat. It was time to go.

Jackie grabbed her arm and pulled her back around. It was almost violent and part of Shauna just wanted her to snap. She wanted her to just do whatever she wanted to her. She would take anything Jackie would give her, no matter how badly it hurt. “You don’t just get to show up here, mess with my fucking head like this and just leave. What the fuck is wrong with you Shauna? Seriously are you trying to fucking kill me?” She needed something.

Jackie wanted to talk or to beat on her chest or yell. Otherwise she would've just let Shauna leave. Part of her started to feel a little optimistic.

"Let's just go talk, please. You need something, I can tell. I want to give you whatever you need. I don't want to ruin your life. Please." Shauna looked at her trying to search her face for any kind of reaction. All Jackie did was hold her glare and turn around to walk back to the house. Shauna released the breath she had been holding probably all day and followed her up the stairs and into her bedroom. Shauna closed the door behind her and turned to face Jackie. "Jackie… I'm not trying to hurt you, I just… I don't know." Shauna lost her train of thought. Jackie's desk lamp was the only light in the room and it traced Jackie's outline in a way that would probably live in every one of Shauna's dreams until the day she died. She was beautiful.

"You just what?" Jackie stared at her with her eyebrows furrowed and Shauna's breath caught in her throat. She didn't know. She didn't know what. What was she supposed to say? How was she supposed to just walk in here and spill everything? She needed Jackie to tell her how much she wanted to hear. Shauna couldn't handle saying too much and hurting her more than she asked for. "You came here to talk, I let you talk, and again you have nothing to say. Why do you keep showing up here?" How could she ever stay away? When Jackie looked at her looking like she wanted to fucking kill her and wearing *that?* Shauna was always going to come back. Always. That wasn't exactly Jackie's question though.

"I just don't want to hurt you, Jax. I don't want to say something you're not ready for, I don't want to push you away even further. I'm trying to go at your pace, but…" Shauna trailed off. It felt wrong to ask her to help.

"But what?"

"I need you to guide me. Help me. Ask me whatever you want, please."

Jackie nodded at her, "Why are you really here?"

"I-," Jackie took a step toward her and Shauna's words failed her, she tried again, "I can't stay away from you…" Shauna's eyes darted down to Jackie's lips and she grinned when she noticed. Shauna gasped a little bit and found herself licking her own.

"You want me to ask you whatever I want?" Jackie was actually willing to do it. Thank fucking god.

"Yes… please, Jackie."

"Did you like it?" That was not what she was supposed to ask. How could Shauna even describe it? Yes, she had liked it. She orgasmed from it, but she didn't even really know why or for what reason. She didn't even know if she liked Jeff.

"I shouldn't have done it, Jackie, I regret it." It wasn't a lie. She didn't like that she had done it, and she regretted it more than anything she had ever done.

Jackie took another step forward, 6 inches away from Shauna now. "That isn't what I asked… you did, didn't you?"

Shauna's breath hitched. She was trying to relax. She didn't want to say the wrong thing and have Jackie pull away, but she knew she had to be honest. "I didn't… dislike it."

"You said you were gonna be honest, Shauna, didn't you?"

Shauna took a deep breath. She had to tell the truth. "Yes. I liked it."

Jackie took another step forward and Shauna backed herself into the bedroom door. "Did he make you cum, Shauna?" Jackie leaned into Shauna and whispered it in her ear as she locked the door. Shauna gasped. Holy fuck. She knew where this was going and she couldn't fucking wait. She needed to be touched. She needed it even if Jackie was yelling at her the whole time. She needed her hands and her mouth.

Shauna practically whined in her response, "Yes."

Jackie grabbed Shauna's hips roughly and pulled her close, making their bodies flush. Shauna gasped and moaned quietly. She watched Jackie's eyes drop to her cleavage and felt her hands slip around the backs of Shauna's thighs under her dress, "Oh my god, Jax." Everything Jackie touched felt like it was lit on fire. Shauna felt the skin on her thighs burn and ache. She wanted more.

Jackie's eyes moved back, first up to Shauna's lips and then her eyes. She had a darkness in her eyes that Shauna hadn't ever seen before. It looked fucking sexy on her. Jackie's hands started pulling gently at Shauna's dress, "Did you let him suck on your tits, Shauna?" She didn't wait for her response before looking back down. Shauna's dress was pulled up over her hips now and Jackie moaned at the sight of the thong Shauna had picked out. She smiled a little at the validation of it. Jackie's hands went to work, unzipping her dress and unclasping her bra, letting it all fall to the ground. Shauna watched her lean down and open her mouth. Before her tongue could make contact with her nipple, Shauna moaned "Yes…" Jackie gently sucked on each nipple before pulling away to look at her. Shauna was so wet it was fucking ridiculous. Jackie's thumb pulled down on Shauna's lip while her index finger held her chin up. Their lips were so close to touching. Shauna fucking needed her lips. She needed the taste and the feel of them.

"Did you let him kiss you?" Jackie muffled her yes with a sloppy, hard kiss, and Shauna moaned desperately into her mouth. Shauna wanted to do this forever. Jackie's hands moved up her stomach and grabbed at her tits. Shauna needed to breathe but honestly, she would have rathered pass out than ever break away. Jackie pulled her to the bed by her hips and pushed her down onto it. She pulled her lips away, resulting in a pathetically whiney groan from Shauna. Jackie pushed her thigh between Shauna's legs and it felt so good she felt like she was going to start crying. She had wanted this so bad and for so long. Jackie leaned down and whispered her next question, "Did he make you feel better than I could, baby?" Shauna gasped. What? Fuck no. Never.

Her response reflected her panic, "No, Jax, no. He could never." Jackie grinned in the hottest possible way and started to pick up her pace. Shauna moaned at the added friction.

"Have you been craving this? Or have you just been getting your fix elsewhere?"

Shauna was too desperate to even grasp what she was asking. Did she really think she had fucked somebody else? "Oh, baby, I've wanted it so badly. Please fuck me. Please." Jackie smiled wide listening to her begging for it. She didn't take her eyes off of her as she pulled her underwear to the side and pushed two fingers inside her. Shauna felt tears start to run down her face. This was everything she had fucking needed and it felt *so* good. She opened

her mouth to moan and Jackie covered it, pushing her head hard down into the mattress. Shauna didn't ever want to look away but her eyes involuntarily rolled back in her head. She grabbed hard at Jackie's sheets, needing anything to feel fucking grounded in any kind of way. Jackie had ruined her. It had been like 15 seconds and she was already close. She dug her heels into the bed and right as she was about to fall off the edge she felt Jackie pull out of her entirely. Shauna groaned and cried into Jackie's hand. She didn't care at all and just torturously ran her hands over Shauna's thighs. She was so tense and every piece of her felt like it was on fire. Jackie fucking laughed at her before leaning down to suck on her nipples. Shauna desperately thrusted her hips, trying to find anything to give her what she needed. Jackie didn't stop sucking on her as she pushed her fingers back inside. Shauna was no longer in control of herself at all. If Jackie's hand hadn't been covering her mouth her scream would've woken the whole fucking neighborhood. Her hands flew to grab Jackie's and never let her take her fingers back. She had a death grip on her wrist and could feel the way Jackie's tendons and muscles flexed as she pushed in and out of her. Shauna felt the loss of stimulation on her nipples and looked down to follow Jackie's mouth back up to her eye level.

"Can you be quiet? Just for a second?" Shauna nodded frantically. She would've done anything Jackie asked of her. She would find a way to control herself if that's what she wanted. Jackie removed her hand and Shauna gasped at the new rush of air. "How bad do you want it? I want you to fucking beg."

Shauna wasted no time at all in following her commands. "Oh, fuck, please," She said it a little too loudly and consciously quieted herself back down, "Please baby, please I want to cum so bad. I need it. Please!" Jackie moaned and threw a pillow down on her face before crawling down her body. She pulled her fingers out of Shauna's pussy and before Shauna could let out a desperate scream for more, Jackie pushed down on the pillow, muffling every little moan or cry she could muster. Shauna thrusted her hips again, needing fucking ANYTHING to touch her. She felt Jackie's hands on her legs, ripping her underwear off and pulling them apart, and then her forearm putting pressure on her hips. Shauna felt Jackie's tongue push into her and she felt her muscles tense at the touch. This was all it was going to take. Just a little bit of stimulation. She felt the release rush through the bottom of her stomach and when Jackie pushed her fingers back inside, one orgasm turned into two. Jackie sucked gently at her clit as her fingers curled deep inside her and Shauna came again, clutching at Jackie's hair as she did. Before Shauna could even gather a thought, Jackie's hands grabbed harshly at Shauna's ankles and yanked her down further on the bed.

Shauna sat up, letting the pillow fall off her face and onto the floor. She watched Jackie take her own underwear off and climb on top of Shauna's face. Shauna reached up to grip her thighs. She stuck her tongue out, offering it for Jackie to sit on. She watched Jackie's eyes roll back in her head and her skirt fell over Shauna's eyes as she dropped herself lower onto Shauna's mouth, muffling her the moan that came deep from Shauna's chest. Shauna craned her neck to attack Jackie's pussy. She wanted to taste all of it. She wanted to make her feel better than she ever had. She loved being underneath her. She loved Jackie grinding her hips into Shauna's mouth and nose, not caring if she could breathe or about anything other than just *using her* to get off. Shauna still couldn't get enough and she grabbed Jackie's ass to hold her in place. She sucked on her clit and moved her tongue in circles over it. Jackie moaned and Shauna took it as an invitation to go harder. She felt Jackie's thighs start to shake and Shauna supported all of her weight, not wanting it to stop on her account. Jackie came hard on Shauna's face and Shauna moaned as she licked eagerly at her opening. She

wanted everything that Jackie would give her. She wanted to taste all of it and she wanted to feel and hear all of it. Jackie's moans were muffled but loud and REAL. Shauna ate at her like she was fucking starving, unwilling to be the one to put an end to this.

Shauna lost count of how many times Jackie had orgasmed before she fell off of her face and collapsed onto the bed. Shauna licked her lips, missing the constant taste that was left behind on them. She couldn't stop smiling. Maybe Jackie had worked through it. Obviously there were more conversations to be had, but maybe make up sex was just what they needed. "Oh my god, Jackie…" Shauna laughed a little in disbelief, "That was so hot." Shauna looked over and saw Jackie staring at the ceiling blank faced.

"You fucked him while we were together?" Shauna deflated and felt that familiar weight back on her chest. Fuck. She reminded herself that she promised to be honest.

"Yes. Once."

Jackie's face didn't change. She just stared. "We were together every day. We had sex every day. When?"

Shauna sat up, now feeling very vulnerable without any clothes on. She covered herself before answering, "You told me you were going to fuck him. I was hurt. I was jealous. I thought that maybe I just wasn't enough for you, and in some fucked up way I wanted to hurt you back, make you feel that way too." Jackie flinched and Shauna felt her eyes start to water.

"That didn't answer the question." Shauna took a deep breath. She couldn't start crying. She had to answer the question and not fucking cry.

"Your mom wanted you home for some brunch with your grandparents or something. He called, said you blew him off all week. I don't know why, Jax, I wish I did—" Shauna saw Jackie's face contort in pain and she started to cry. "You wanted him, and that made me want him. You talked about fucking him, and it made me want to. It felt so unfair—"

"Get out." Jackie said it so calmly, like it meant nothing to her. Shauna started to panic. She had thought they were rounding some kind of corner here. She thought they were working through things. Jackie had fucked her. She had kissed her, she had made her cum and tasted her. She wanted her… right?

"Jackie, no, just let me explain it." Shauna grabbed her arm, trying to bridge the gap between them that now felt very *very* wide. Jackie pulled away and snapped her head down to look at her.

"Shauna, none of this was unfair to YOU. Just to be clear." Shauna paused. It had been. It absolutely had been unfair to her. Fucking her like it was everything in the world and then turning around to treat it like nothing? Kissing her and salivating over her body like she couldn't possibly want anybody else and then immediately talking about Jeff? It had been unfair. Yes, Shauna was worse. What she did was way, way, way worse, but it wasn't like Jackie was fucking perfect in this. If she loved Shauna like she said she did and wanted her for more than what she had showed, that was pretty fucking unfair too.

"Bullshit." Shauna watched Jackie turn slowly. It was almost eerie.

“What… Do you mean, bullshit?” Jackie practically spat at her. Shauna started to get defensive. She was going to lose her. She was going to lose Jackie entirely because she truly believed that she had done nothing wrong. She couldn’t just let that happen.

“You were fucking me when you were fucking Jeff, I was fucking you when I was fucking Jeff. I know. Believe me, I know that I was more wrong than you. I do understand that. But for you to be blameless here, and refuse to talk to me or even have a fucking conversation due to your fucking moral high ground, is insane, Jax.” Jackie’s jaw dropped as she listened to Shauna speak. “I have been patient… I have tried to give you space, but you know what? It is fucking unfair to me. It was unfair to you… but now it’s unfair to me.”

Jackie laughed, “Oh well fuck me, Shauna. I’m sorry that I can’t bring myself to think about you without wanting to throw up! I’m sorry that I can’t sit here and listen to how you LIKED FUCKING MY BOYFRIEND, without hating you. I’m sorry, Shauna, that it is SO UNFAIR to you for me to not talk to you.” That is not what she meant, and Jackie fucking knew that. She knew that! Why was she fucking doing this? Shauna took a deep breath.

Shauna tried to de-escalate. “Jackie— no that’s not what I meant and you know it.”

“Get the fuck out. Now, Shauna. Fucking leave.” Shauna looked at her and just waited for her to change her mind. She waited for her to lean back in and tear into her again. She wanted her to scream and yell and hit her if she needed to, but she didn’t even flinch. ‘I fucking MEAN IT.’ Jackie’s eyes had a fire in them that Shauna realized was never going to get less frightening. “GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE.” Shauna stood up and quickly grabbed a shirt and a pair of shorts from Jackie’s dresser and threw them on. She looked back at Jackie one last time, hoping that she would stop her or at least fucking *look* at her, but she didn’t. Jackie had already turned away. Shauna grabbed her dress, bra and underwear off the floor and walked out of Jackie’s room. She shut the door and sunk to the ground beneath it. All she could do was cry. She wanted so badly for Jackie to change her mind, but she wouldn’t. Shauna knew she wouldn’t. It was over. Jackie was done with her. She tried to muffle her sobs as she ran down the stairs. The girls were all asleep in the living room and Nat shot up at the noise to chase her out of the house without another word.

Chapter 14

Shauna spent the drive home pretty much just hyperventilating. Nat drove way faster than she should've and got them there in under 5 minutes. Shauna pushed through her front door and collapsed onto the living room floor. Jackie wanted nothing to do with her. Her voice was so hollow and so empty. Shauna had meant nothing. She felt like nothing. She had fucked her like she couldn't get enough of her. She had taken complete control and Shauna wanted her to have it. Shauna wanted her to have everything, she would've done anything for her to just see her again… like *really* see her. Jackie didn't want it. Shauna's head was reeling.

"Shauna. Breathe, baby. You have to breathe." Nat was yelling it but Shauna could barely hear her. She felt her climb behind her and pull her body up to sit upright against her chest. 'In and out, Shipman. Like me.' She felt Nat's deep breaths against her back and started to try to mimic them. She slowly started to calm down, and Nat smoothed her hair. Shauna turned to look at her and she could see in Nat's face that she was a disaster. "What the fuck did she do?" Nat was angry. She was really, really angry. She shook Shauna's arms gently. "Shipman. What the fuck did she do?"

Shauna shook her head. "Nothing. Nothing. I deserved it. I'm just… I'm a mess." Shauna tried to control her breathing to seem more put together than she felt. Nat wasn't buying it.

"Stop. You fucked up, we both get that. You don't deserve to constantly be made to feel like shit. I expected screaming or crying or just turning you away… but she didn't do that. Instead she brought you up to her fucking bedroom. What the fuck happened?"

Shauna looked down. She did deserve to feel like shit. She deserved that. "Nat I appreciate you trying to be on my side… but I deserve whatever she wants to give me. And I want it." Nat's face fell. She looked appalled and Shauna couldn't understand it. She would do anything Jackie wanted her to do. If she wanted Shauna to hurt then that's what she would do. Wasn't that obvious? Wouldn't anybody do that for Jackie if she asked them to? Nat shook her head.

"Fuck that. If you don't wanna tell me what she did then I'll go find out for myself." Nat stood up and Shauna grabbed her wrist, pulling her back down. She couldn't go interrogate Jackie right now. Shauna wouldn't have it.

"She asked questions and then she fucked me," Nat looked down at her, unmoving with her arms crossed on her chest. Shauna took a deep breath and continued, trying not to break down. It didn't work. "She fucked me… like she was moving past it. I thought— I thought she wanted me again, and then she just told me to leave." She felt tears run down her face again and looked up to find Nat damn near shaking.

"You can't let her fucking do this to you." Shauna was confused. Jackie didn't do anything. Shauna did this. Shauna ruined them. She shook her head.

"I did this."

"Fuck that, Shauna. Seriously. Fuck her. You are both fucking guilty in this and I know that you know that." Shauna didn't respond. Of course she thought that, but she wasn't going to talk shit about Jackie to Nat. She couldn't. She didn't even really like that Nat had said anything bad about her at all. Nat dropped back down to her level and held her face up in her hands. "You need to let this shit go." Shauna shook her head and Nat sighed. She probably realized this wasn't going anywhere.

"I think she's pretty much done with me anyway." Nat looked at her for a second before pulling her into a tight hug. Shauna immediately started crying again. She had pretty much never cried like this in her life. It wasn't panicked, it wasn't out of fear, it was just deep, deep sadness. Jackie didn't want her. She had wanted her and she had loved her, and now she didn't. Shauna had no idea how to process that, so she pushed her face into Nat's chest and cried until the sun came up.

She woke up with her head on Nat's lap. Her throat was sore, her eyes hurt and she overall pretty much just felt like she got hit by a truck. She invited it. She wanted to feel like shit. She liked it. Shauna sat up and looked back at Nat sleeping against the side of the couch. She owed her so much. Even just getting her back here in one piece had to have been near impossible. Shauna stood up and walked upstairs to the bathroom. She looked at herself in the mirror and had no idea what she looked like because she couldn't pull her eyes away from the striped shirt she had chosen. It was Jackie's. It was the last piece of Jackie that Shauna was probably ever going to touch. She took it off as carefully as she could, like it was worth thousands of dollars. She looked at it and pulled it to her face, breathing in Jackie's scent. She started to cry again.

She remembered the way Jackie had touched her. She remembered the way it felt like she *needed* Shauna to cum. How did it go from that to getting kicked out *so* quickly. She was so stupid to think that Jackie would just be able to move past it. Shauna had ruined her life. Jackie was never going to move past that. She folded the shirt and set it on the counter before taking Jackie's shorts off and doing the same. She climbed into the shower and sat under the water. She couldn't bring herself to stand, much less actually use soap and clean herself. She just stared at her feet against the shower floor, hoping to feel any kind of motivation stir up inside her. Eventually, she pulled her soap bottle down and slowly spread some over her body. It wasn't great and probably didn't even really clean anything, but it was better than nothing. She rinsed herself off and walked to the sink, she had to wash the remnants of Jackie off of her face. She licked her lips, hoping to taste her again but she couldn't. She closed her eyes and tried to remember the last time Jackie touched her. She remembered the feeling of her thighs and her ass in her hands. Jackie had been so beautiful. Shauna opened her eyes and washed her face before she was able to talk herself into just leaving it, which she knew was both unhygienic and gross.

She put Jackie's clothes back on and opened the door to Nat sprinting up the stairs. She was hyperventilating and looking at Shauna with very real fear and panic in her eyes. "Hey, hey. What? What happened?" Nat grabbed her hands and Shauna could've sworn she had seen a tear drop from her eye.

"I thought— oh fuck. I woke up and you weren't there and I thought…" Shauna squeezed her hand. Nat had truly thought she left to go hurt herself. What had this poor girl been

through to really truly panic in this way?

"Hey, listen… Calm down, okay? I'm okay. I just needed to shower." Shauna was really trying not to minimize her fear or her worry, but this was so out of nowhere it was hard to control her phrasing. Nat took some deep breaths and Shauna held her.

"I'm sorry… I just— I'm so sorry I can't believe I didn't wake up when you got up."

"I didn't want you to, honey. I just wanted to let you sleep." Shauna walked them to her bed and sat down on the edge. Nat sat next to her and covered her face with her hands. She had never seen her so broken and vulnerable. It was a little unnerving to see her so torn up. Shauna wanted to ask her. She wanted to know what had terrorized this girl to this point, but she didn't want to make her more stressed out. They sat in silence for a second, both trying to collect themselves.

"I'm sorry, Shauna." Nat said it without even looking up at her.

"No. Don't be sorry for worrying about me. Please." Shauna looked at her and it seemed like her words didn't even do anything, 'I'm not going to… I don't want to die, Nat.' Nat looked up at her and nodded. Shauna had to ask. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to, but did something happen to make you this scared? You're just not usually very… emotional, I guess. I want you to know I'm here if you want to talk about anything."

Nat took a deep breath, looking up at Shauna and then back down at her hands as she started to cry. She took a deep breath and decided to explain, "I spent most of my life hoping that I wouldn't have to keep surviving. My dad was…" Nat's eyes filled with tears and Shauna grabbed her hand to comfort her. Nat hesitated and then just gave up on it. 'He was fucking awful. He was mean and abusive to me and worse than that to my mom. I fucking hated him and my mom would never let us leave.' Nat looked up at her and Shauna saw nothing but a scared little kid in her eyes. What had happened to her? "I thought I wanted him dead. One time it was really bad. He started hitting my mom over and over again and I pulled a gun on him. I pulled the trigger, but it didn't work. I had to watch my parents realize that I had every intention of killing him. I had to watch them look at me like a fucking demon. He pulled the gun out of my hands and started yelling and it just… went off. It was an accident. It was a complete accident and he fucking died. I didn't shoot him, but my mom pretty much blames me for it. Hard to really hold it against her. It's not like I didn't try." Shauna froze. Holy shit. She tried to pick her jaw up off the floor and think about some kind of response to that. Nat had shut off, much like Shauna had that first time she tried to talk to Jackie. Shauna could recognize the blank stare. She continued, "She hates me. I just… couldn't live in that house anymore. I went to the soccer field with a handful of pills and a bottle of whiskey and I was just going to end it. I didn't see my life going much better from that point on and I was ready for it to just be over, but Coach found me. He didn't know exactly what I was doing there… just that I needed help. That's when he gave me the key to the locker room." Coach had literally saved Nat's life, which had probably in turn saved Shauna's. Did she really think that her dad's death was her fault? She was the victim of the situation. She was the victim of her entire childhood from the sound of it.

"I'm so sorry. That's… you know that isn't your fault, right? You were protecting your mom, and even if you had been willing to kill him, you still didn't." Nat nodded her head slowly.

"I know. It just… the looks on their faces. I might not have killed my dad that day, but I killed my mom. It killed her." Nat looked at the floor. Shauna had no idea what to say. Neither of them deserved her.

"You were a kid. We are kids. Your mom was supposed to protect you and she didn't. This was not your fault, Nat. None of it was your fault." Nat looked up at her and she started to cry. Had no one told her that? 'Does anybody know?' She shook her head and Shauna grabbed it, pulling it into herself. She had just been sitting on this? For months? Shauna rocked back and forth, holding Nat as she cried in her arms. "I'm so sorry honey. It's not your fault. It's not your fault." Shauna repeated it over and over again until she had calmed down. After a while they both fell backwards into Shauna's bed and fell asleep.

When Shauna woke up, Nat was still asleep. She couldn't believe what she had just been sitting on this whole time. Shauna knew immediately that Nat was never going back to that locker room. She was never going back to her mom's place. She was living at the Shipman house until she was able to find a new plan. Shauna got up slowly, trying not to wake her and moved to her desk. Everything that happened with Jackie had been running in circles in her head since it all happened. She pulled out her journal and started to write.

What a fucking mess I've made of myself. I let Jackie make an absolute fool out of me. I gave her all of me. I gave her complete control of my body and I was completely honest with her. I really thought that would be enough. I really thought I just had to talk and she would be able to move past it, but she never had any real intention of that. She wanted me for one fucking thing, just one last time. It's kind of ironic honestly. I fucked everything up because I thought she just wanted something physical, and now I've come far enough to be exactly what I thought I was. I never thought anything could leave me feeling so empty, and the worst part is… I would do it all over again. The most embarrassing part is that no matter how awful I feel now, I know that I would do whatever she asked me and I'd do with a fucking smile on my face. I'd do anything for just another opportunity to talk to her or to touch her. I think she's ruined me.

Shauna heard a distant knock at the front door and looked over at Nat, who was still fast asleep in her bed. Shauna couldn't remember the last time somebody had knocked on her door. Everybody usually just walked in. Shauna quietly made her way downstairs and opened the door. Lottie stood there smiling at her. Shauna looked at her a little confused. Didn't all of Jackie's friends fucking hate her?

"Hey, Shauna. How are you doing?" Shauna squinted at her. There was something about Lottie that Shauna just never really seemed to understand.

"Aren't you supposed to hate me?"

"I don't hate you, Shauna." Shauna nodded slowly and opened the door for her to come in. She looked around and Shauna realized she wanted to talk to Nat. She probably should've come to that conclusion sooner.

"She's asleep. Upstairs." Lottie nodded and they looked at each other for a minute. "So… *why* don't you hate me? Tai was ready to bury my head into Jackie's front door last night, but now you're here asking how I am?"

Lottie smiled softly. Nothing fucking rattled her. “It’s a complicated situation. I think you did an awful thing, but I don’t think you did it with awful intentions. In my head, intention is more important than action. Tai doesn’t think the same way I do.” Shauna nodded. It was kind of nice to feel understood by somebody who was so close to Jackie. Maybe if Lottie could understand it then Jackie wasn’t too far behind. “And you’ve been good to Natalie. I couldn’t ever hate somebody who was so kind to her.”

“So you’re not pissed at her for bringing me last night?”

“She was trying to do the right thing. Again, she didn’t have bad intentions.”

“So… what exactly are yours with her? I’m assuming you’re leaving in the fall? What happens to her then?”

“I’m actually going to Brown too. For psych. That’s kind of why I came by, actually. I was gonna see if she’d want to go with me. To Providence, I mean.” A smile teased Shauna’s lips. She could move to Providence with Nat. They could be there together. She wouldn’t have to start over. She wouldn’t have to try to explain all of this shit to new people. She could just… bring Nat along. Suddenly Shauna felt the urge to hug Lottie. Obviously she didn’t, but still. She felt it.

“She’s in my room. Up the stairs and to the right.” Lottie smiled at her and nodded, walking past her up the stairs and out of sight. Shauna looked at the time and realized how late it had gotten. Her mom was going to be home within the hour and Shauna hadn’t started dinner. She took a deep breath and started cooking, leaving Nat and Lottie to have some alone time upstairs.

The four of them sat around the table for dinner and made casual conversation. Her mom was obviously excited to have people over, but Shauna could tell she missed Jackie. She couldn’t really blame her, she missed Jackie too. After dinner, Deb excused herself and headed to bed. Lottie left shortly after and Nat and Shauna worked together to clean up their dishes.

“So… Can I ask you something?” Nat said. Shauna looked up at her, not sure where this was going, and nodded. ‘I know I’ve been like all up in your space and college is like where you grow and find new people or whatever… But, Lottie asked me to go to Providence with her.’ Shauna smiled and Nat continued, “I told her that I couldn’t just follow you and that I’d have to think about it.” Shauna laughed.

“Dude what? You told her no?”

“No… I told her I had to think about it. I didn’t know if you would think I was like weird or something just trailing you to college.”

Shauna laughed harder, “Yes I’m actually pissed that I no longer have to leave my only friend behind alone in this fucking town. I’m furious,” Shauna said sarcastically. Nat laughed and continued drying the dishes.

“You seriously wouldn’t mind?” Shauna finished washing the last dish and looked up at her.

“Not at all. Seriously.” Nat smiled and nodded. Shauna was relieved that she didn’t have to face it all by herself. She was already facing a life without Jackie, but one without Nat

too? It just felt a little too cruel.

Chapter 15

The next week they were set to graduate. Deb was able to get off of work to attend, and she ended up being everybody's biggest cheerleader. Shauna was kind of excited to be seated in the same row as Jackie. Their last names were so close together, she kind of just assumed they would be, but when she showed up she found her name tag almost exactly a row behind her. Apparently with the way it was all set up, they had wrapped around instead of gone side by side. Shauna spent the entire 3 hour ceremony with her eyes glued to the back of Jackie's neck. When she went on stage to grab her diploma, Shauna was finally able to see her whole face. Her eyeliner was darker than normal and it made her bright eyes pop. She was wearing a short white dress and a pair of heels that accentuated the muscle in her calves. Shauna nearly missed her cue to start walking because she was too busy watching Jackie walk back to her seat. After she shook Principal Berzonsky's hand, she caught Jackie watching her. They locked eyes and the whole world fell away. She couldn't even hear her mom cheering. She stumbled over the last step, tearing her eyes away and when she looked back up, Jackie was back to not caring. Shauna was crushed. That was how easy it was for Jackie to ruin her day. It was like every emotion Shauna had rode solely on whether or not Jackie was paying attention to her. She fucking *missed* her. She wanted her so badly.

After the ceremony, Deb ran up to her and Nat, gave them both hugs and congratulated them. Shauna was happy that she was able to make her mom so proud, but she felt her gaze fall over her shoulder, trying to find Jackie in the crowd. She was essentially her other daughter, and Shauna wanted so badly for her to just go find her. "Mom, we'll be okay here for a minute. Why don't you go find her?"

Deb looked up at Shauna with guilt in her eyes, "No, no. She's probably with her own parents. It's okay." Shauna looked at Nat, unsure of how she'd be able to convince her mom to go.

"Her parents aren't here. I don't think anybody came for her, actually." Shauna's head snapped to look at Nat. Her parents didn't come to her graduation? What the fuck? Shauna looked back to see her mom almost in tears. She nodded and turned into the crowd to go find her.

"Her parents didn't come to her graduation? What happened?" Shauna asked Nat as soon as her mom was out of earshot.

"I don't know. I didn't ask. That's all Lottie knew." Shauna nodded.

"Are her parents here? Are you gonna meet up with them?"

Nat's eyes got big, "Oh god, no. I mean, yes they're here. No, I'm not meeting them."

"You've already met them. We all have at one point or another."

"We've met them as soccer teammates, not as a girlfriend who is moving in with their daughter."

"They wouldn't be okay with it?" Nat looked at Shauna like she was ready for the conversation to be over. Apparently it wasn't up for discussion.

"We both know Deb would be fine with it but you're still telling her Jackie isn't speaking to you because you're going to Brown." Yeah, true. Valid. Shauna nodded and let that be the end of the discussion.

"And your mom?" Nat didn't look at her when she responded.

"Not invited."

"Got it." When Shauna's mom got back she didn't discuss her conversation with Jackie, and Shauna couldn't tell if she was upset about it or not. She wanted any crumb of Jackie interaction she could get, even if it wasn't with her. But she also knew how badly it hurt to watch her mom grieve her, and Shauna wasn't sure if she could handle that.

When they all got home, Deb got dressed for work and left them both with a kiss on the cheek, leaving behind a bottle of nice wine as a graduation gift to them both.

The next few weeks went by without a word from Jackie. Shauna wasn't exactly surprised, but it still hurt to know Jackie was able to just live her life without Shauna and without a problem. It occurred to her that Jackie had never sought her out to talk. Jackie had never found her or tracked her down to check on her. Shauna had been chasing after somebody that clearly wanted nothing to do with her, and that realization kind of sucked.

Her and Nat were sitting on Shauna's bedroom floor. It was late July and Fiona Apple had just released *Tidal* on CD. Criminal had become Shauna's new favorite song, and she hadn't been able to turn it off since she bought the record.

"Does she ever ask Lottie about me?" Nat looked up at her.

"I don't know. Why?"

"Do you guys have like conversations? How do you not know?"

Nat laughed, "I think what you meant to ask was… 'Do we talk about *you?*' and the answer to that would be no." Shauna couldn't tell if she was joking to try to be a dick or if she actually didn't know. Nat rolled her eyes, 'Seriously, I don't have a clue. If she did, Lot didn't tell me about it. Ever since the party we've tried not to discuss it.' Shauna nodded, trying to hide her disappointment. She thought she was doing a good job until Nat sighed and continued, "Jesus with the sad puppy look. She moved into Rutgers last month. That's all the updates I have." Last month? Last *month?* How could Shauna have not known that?

"She's been gone for a fucking month?" Nat nodded slowly. It shouldn't have mattered. It didn't really make a difference. They weren't speaking anyway… but, she was like really gone. She was gone, gone. Shauna leaned back, feeling like she had lost her all over again.

"Were you gonna try to talk to her again?" Nat asked it like she was confused, probably because Shauna was being confusing.

"No. I just… I don't know. What's she been doing? She's like really gone." Nat rested her head on Shauna's shoulder and sat like that for a minute while Shauna processed. She probably had a whole new life. She probably had new friends and was back to her normal self. She was probably never thinking about Shauna or the way she had fucked her life up

back home. Shauna wondered if she was going to tell anyone about her. She wanted to know what she told them. She wanted to know what Jackie thought of her now that she was apparently so disconnected.

That night, Lottie invited her and Nat over to a little get together at her house. Shauna was hesitant, but Nat really wanted her to go. "I don't fucking like them either, Shipman. Come on, you can't make me go by myself." Nat was practically begging her, but sitting awkwardly in a room with Tai didn't feel like the way she wanted her night to go. A long run, maybe a drink or two and then a melatonin to put herself to sleep. That had been her routine. Now she was going to diverge from that plan to hang out with Taissa fucking Turner?

"You might not like them but they will tolerate you. Last time I saw Tai she looked ready to try to beat my ass."

"If I remember correctly, she didn't exactly back down when I stepped in front of you." Shauna smiled a little and Nat played off of it, "Plus, you're like totally jacked now. It's not like she would win." Nat grinned at her and Shauna laughed.

"Do they know I'm invited?" It didn't seem very believable that they'd be on board.

"Who cares? It's Lottie's house, not theirs." Nat was pleading with her and Shauna knew she couldn't tell her no.

"You seriously want me to come? Because I do not want to. I won't feel left out and I would be happy to just hang out here and go to bed. If you're trying to convince me so that I don't get FOMO you can just cut your losses."

"I want you there. Please?" Shauna sighed and relented.

"Fine. But when they lose their shit that's on you."

"No, actually. That would be on Lottie." Shauna rolled her eyes and spent the rest of the night dreading what she knew was coming. They walked up to the door and Shauna took a deep breath before Nat opened it and walked inside. She was met with an immediate eye roll from Tai and hushed whispers with a lot of side eyed glances in their direction. Lottie shushed them and waved Nat and Shauna in, but it was awkward. Shauna didn't want to be there. Nobody wanted her there and they weren't even trying to hide it. It was clear that the three of them had started drinking long before Shauna and Nat had pulled up, and Shauna considered making herself something to catch up but decided against it just in case she had to make a quick getaway. Kevyn Tan's basement couch wasn't all that comfortable the first time. Everybody played nice for a while but all it took was one person to mention Jackie for everything to blow up.

In passing conversation, Lottie said that she missed her. Shauna looked down and swallowed hard, trying not to react and Tai laughed. She looked up and realized it was directed at her. She was laughing at her. For a second she had thought she missed something. She looked over at Nat and realized that no. She had not missed anything. Nat was shooting daggers at Tai and Shauna knew what this was going to be.

"Sorry, no. I just… how are you gonna sit there and look all sad like you miss her too?"

Lottie tried to step in and say something, but Shauna didn't need her to fight her battles. "What the fuck are you talking about? Of course I miss her."

She scoffed and Shauna felt her face get hot. How was she going to dismiss it? She could've said whatever she wanted. She could've dug at her in a thousand different ways, but was she really trying to insinuate that Shauna didn't miss her? All she fucking did was miss her. "Do you need to get something off your chest? Just fucking say it, Tai."

Tai smiled from across the circle and Shauna watched Van's face fall. This wasn't going to get any better. "You just can't sit there and pretend to care about her. After everything you've done… how can you sit here of all places," she paused to gesture around her at Lottie's house. She was trying to remind Shauna of what had happened in the kitchen 3 months ago, like it wasn't on a constant loop in her head. Shauna shook her head and Tai continued, "and act all fucking sad now that she's gone. All she did was waste her fucking time on you." Shauna could feel the room go cold. That last sentence was beyond unnecessary and every piece of her wanted to jump across the circle and make her feel the pain and anger that had built up inside of her for the past 6 months. She wanted so badly to make Tai fear her and to make her fucking understand, but instead she took a step forward for herself. She took a deep breath and responded in a way that no other version of herself would've been able to.

"I'm glad she has you, Tai." That was all she said. She watched Tai laugh a-fucking-gain and she ground her teeth to stop herself from changing her statement.

"We're all just glad she no longer has you." Shauna's stomach churned and she felt sick. It was true. She couldn't really be upset, but fucking OW.

"You know… I used to really look up to you, Taissa. I spent all of high school looking at the two of you," Shauna glanced quickly at an expressionless Van and then looked back at Tai, 'and feeling so proud and so fucking happy that you guys had found each other. I'm not going to pretend to know your story and in no way am I undermining how difficult I'm sure you guys have had it, but newsflash… it's fucking 1996 in suburban New Jersey. Not everybody is gonna be able to safely fucking communicate romantic feelings and deal with their shit like you. Not everybody has their whole fucking life put together at 16 like you. What Jackie and I had was fucked up and backwards and probably toxic and I will own that, but it was fucking *real* . Just like what you two have is *real* . You can fucking hate me, you can dig at me and you can try to somehow make me feel fucking worse about the state of my life than I already do, but you *will not* try to make it seem like it was nothing. We all know that it wasn't fucking nothing.' Tai didn't respond and the room stayed absolutely silent. Shauna held eye contact with her a little longer, practically itching for her to respond. She didn't feel satisfied, but she knew she had done the right thing. The worst part of her wanted a fucking fight, but it didn't come. She turned to Lottie. "Thank you for inviting me tonight. I had a really great time. I'm sure I'll see you guys tomorrow. Be safe tonight, okay?" She forced all of the sarcasm out her voice when she said it. She didn't want Lottie to feel like shit. She was allowed to have fun with all of her people in a room. Shauna probably shouldn't have even accepted the invite. She stood up and walked out of the front door. She got all the way to her car before Nat had jogged to catch up.

"Hey, I'm going with you."

Shauna got in and locked the doors before she could get to the handle. "No. You're gonna stay here with your girlfriend and bond with her friends like she wanted you to. It's important

to her and it's important to me. I told you, I'll be fine. I'm just gonna go work out a bit anyway."

"Hey, no. I'm not gonna hang out with her after everything she just said. I wouldn't do that to you." Shauna knew she meant it, but it was her fault. Tai did have a reason to hate her. They all did, really. She shook her head.

"I'm not letting you in the car. Go back inside, take a shot and put your big girl pants on. Play nice. Love you!" Shauna said it as she pulled out of the driveway, leaving Nat standing in front of the windshield with her arms thrown up.

"I fucking hate you," Nat said, followed quickly by a, "Love you too, Shipman." Shauna laughed and drove straight to the weight room. It was late enough to probably be considered breaking and entering, but Shauna didn't really care. She had for once been able to really control her anger. She didn't even raise her voice, and that had to be due to all of the lifting. She needed this. Shauna hit every possible muscle group over and over again until she felt like she was going to fall asleep on the gym floor. That's how she knew she was ready to go home. When she got there, everything in her wanted to call Jackie. She knew she didn't have her number and she knew that she had nothing more to say. She knew that just apologizing again would probably just hurt her more at this point, but honestly, none of that felt like it mattered at that moment. She just wanted to hear her voice. If she had the ability to, she would've called. Instead she just took a melatonin and collapsed in her bed, clutching Jackie's shirt and holding it to her face. She fell quickly into as deep a sleep as she could.

Chapter 16

The next day, Shauna had been awake for about 15 minutes before Lottie and Nat walked right into her bedroom to check on her.

"Shauna, I am so sorry. I swear they knew you were invited. Apparently they didn't think you'd actually come, which is so dumb because I really wanted you there. I would not have invited you to just get yelled at. I swear."

Shauna waved her off. Something about Lottie just wouldn't let Shauna even think about getting upset with her. She just always seemed so genuine. "I didn't think you did. It's okay. They've got good reason to hate me. Trust me, I get it."

Shauna laughed a little but Nat cut her off, "Not funny, dude. I'm still pissed you just fucking left me there."

"It was important for you to hang out with them. I wanted that for you… for both of you." Shauna looked at Lottie as she said it. She smiled and mouthed a thank you at Shauna that Nat wasn't able to see and Shauna smiled back.

They spent what was left of the summer preparing to move to Providence. Shauna didn't do a bunch of dorm room shopping, knowing that her mom wouldn't be able to help much, but what she did buy ended up pretty much just in various shades of pink and green. She knew it was dumb and kind of cringey to decorate her dorm the way Jackie had always dreamed up the one they'd share together, but it made her feel closer to her. Every pink pillow or towel felt like a little piece of Jackie that Shauna could see every day. Shauna spent the summer studying for and taking different placement exams to get herself in the singles honors dorms, which helped to ease a little bit of anxiety about the move as a whole.

When it was time for Shauna to move in, Nat and Lottie had already left so that Lottie could sign the lease. Shauna drove up with her mom, who cried pretty much the whole four hours. The drive was kind of gut wrenching. Not only was she leaving her mom to be completely alone, but she was leaving every piece of Jackie she had left. Of course, she took Jackie's shirt and shorts that she had been too terrified to wash, but every memory they had ever made was in her hometown, and now that she was moving away and it was very clear that she wasn't ever going to make new ones… it just felt like any warmth or comfort Shauna had left was slowly draining from her body.

She had gotten settled in her little shitty dorm room. The first thing her mom did was set up her phone and make her promise to call home. Again, it was bitter sweet. Sure, her classes were exciting. Sure, she was excited to be on her own, but really she had been independent from the minute she could drive. Even before that, she had been independent and been given responsibilities from the second her dad had left. For everybody else, this was a time when they finally didn't have a curfew or didn't have to ask for permission to do something. For Shauna, this was a time where her mom no longer had anybody to make sure dinner was ready when she got home. Now, Deb had nobody to do the laundry or to clean while she worked, and on top of it all, Shauna had a new life that Jackie was no longer a part

of. She had a new phone number that Jackie didn't have. With every passing moment, it all became more real. It was over.

After Deb left, Shauna pulled out her favorite picture of Jackie. She had only brought the one, knowing that alone was probably weird. The rest stayed up in her bedroom at home. Jackie looked really beautiful. She was in her soccer uniform and she had just scored the winning goal at the state championships. Shauna had jumped into her arms to celebrate and Jackie just looked so… angelic. Untouchable even. She was just so her. Shauna sighed and placed it on her desk that was now doubling as her nightstand in her tiny dorm room. She needed to find a gym.

Shauna wandered into the campus field house and found her way to the public gym. It honestly put Wiskayok to shame. There were like 100 full benches and probably 50 treadmills. There were so many different machines that Shauna had never seen before, and it was fucking *empty* . Shauna knew that it was move in day and that Brown was gonna be full of nerds and she didn't really expect the gym to be packed, but she didn't think all of this equipment would ever go unused.

She decided to skip all of the freshman activities and spend all day getting herself acclimated. She felt her brain start to spiral, wondering who else Jackie had met and what she had been up to, and she decided that her time would probably be better spent doing some kind of stress relief.

Nat found her a few hours later. "I thought you were like ready to nerd out with all these smart people, then Lottie tells me she hasn't seen you once."

Shauna turned off the treadmill and caught her breath to respond, "I'm excited about classes. Not that excited about freshman tours and history lessons."

Nat laughed and leaned casually against the machine. "Your mom leave?"

"Yeah she did. She wanted to see you but she was kind of a mess. I don't think she went an hour without crying all day."

Nat smiled, "You're really lucky, you know?" Shauna nodded. She did know. She might have only had one parent, but she made up for every possible thing that Shauna could have missed out on when her dad left. "Are you doing okay?"

"Yeah, now. I mean I'm just worried. Like is she gonna eat if I'm not there to cook? Is she gonna sleep or just stay up trying to get my chores done?" Nat nodded.

"She's a very smart and capable lady. I'm sure she will be okay. She was okay before you came along."

"She didn't have to work twice as hard to pay for this fancy school before I came around."

"She's gonna be okay. Maybe she'll eat more pizza than she should, but she'll be okay." Shauna smiled.

"How much time you got left here?"

Shauna looked up at the clock. It had been 3 hours. Maybe she should just call it. "I'm good. I was just about to leave. What's up?"

"I was thinking about scoping out a good smoke spot. Wanna join me?" Shauna nodded and trailed her out of the gym. They walked silently through a nearby park on some trail. It felt a little bit like Nat had already scoped out a smoke spot. She seemed to know her way around this place. "So… you wanna talk about it?"

"Talk about what?" Shauna asked, playing dumb. She knew Shauna was thinking about Jackie. Shauna was always thinking about Jackie.

Nat rolled her eyes, "Shauna you went shopping for dorm stuff and came back with more pink than I've ever seen in my life. You have no pink in your room at home and I don't think I've ever seen you wear pink… I'm supposed to think that has nothing to do with Jackie?" They stopped and Nat tucked them into this small clearing. She started to light a joint for them to share.

Shauna sighed. She thought they weren't mentioning that. "I just feel really far from her. I know I'm supposed to. Like… I know that's the point, but it sucks." Nat nodded and handed it over, Shauna gratefully took a couple hits before continuing, "She's never gonna see where I live. She's never going to have my phone number. Every memory I have with her I just left in Wiskayok. I don't know."

Nat sighed and it looked like she was debating whether or not to say something. "Shipman… I think you need to just embrace life here. I mean I know you're struggling, but maybe you can make new friends. Maybe you can find somebody new and do something… I don't know, healthy?" Shauna choked on the smoke. Find somebody new? What the fuck was she talking about? Nat laughed at her. "You are fucking ridiculous. I told you to maybe speak to anybody who isn't Jackie and you're gonna choke and die?"

"Yes. I'm gonna choke and die. One, I have made *one* new friend since first grade. I don't like making new friends. I don't like meeting new people. I usually don't fucking like them, and two, I don't want anybody right now. I'm a fucking mess. My head is a mess and I can't help myself when it comes to hurting the people I'm close to. It would be a fucking disaster.

Nat shook her head, "You know… you're really not that much of a mess." Shauna laughed. What the fuck was she talking about? Nat laughed too at Shauna's reaction before she continued, "No seriously, you were obviously kind of a mess, but it's been months. You said you can't stop yourself from hurting people close to you, but you haven't hurt me. You've actually done nothing but help me even when it sucked for you." Shauna looked up at her, not really buying it. She let Nat crash on her couch, that wasn't exactly the same caliber as sleeping with both her best friend and her best friend's boyfriend and then acting like a complete dick for months about it.

"I haven't done anything special. Sure I let you crash on my couch but like… that doesn't exactly make me stable." Shauna took the joint back and hit it a few times while she waited for Nat's response.

"You could have and probably should have beat the life out of Taissa that night, but you didn't so that I could get to know Lot's friends. You're managing your shit and you're putting a lot of effort into that. Don't undermine it, that isn't fair. You spend like *hours* every day trying to work through stuff. Maybe it's working." Huh. She had shown some restraint

that night, she had been working out for like 3-4 hours every day for the past few months. It didn't really feel like forward progress, but maybe it was.

"Maybe… It kind of feels like, you know, just stuff I have to do to like immediately not crash out, but maybe it is progress or something. I don't know. Regardless, I'm still not talking to new people. I really have no interest in it."

Nat shook her head, "It's a good thing I came with, cause Jesus Christ would you be a mess without me." She laughed at her own joke and Shauna joined in, gently pushing her shoulder back in response.

Shauna spent most of the next few weeks alone. She woke up, went for a run, went to class, lifted and then did her homework pretty much every night. Nat and Lottie invited her over to their place pretty much daily, but it was just hard. She was obviously happy for them both. They were happy, moved in together and living a life together. She couldn't help but think what her life would have been like living at Rutgers with Jackie. If they had been able to talk through their shit would she be living the same life? Regardless of any of that, she knew that if she *was* living that life, she'd be soaking up her alone time with Jackie. Shauna was just trying to give them the space to do it. Every day Nat came by her dorm room and sat while Shauna read or did homework, and one day she finally had enough.

"Dude. It's been like three weeks and you're still moping alone in your room. Please at least come back with me and hang out with us. You can't just rot here for the rest of your life."

Shauna glared at her, "I'm not moping or rotting. I have homework to do."

"Well fucking do it at my place then."

"I'm not gonna go and invade your guys' space every night. You guys are living together and living your lives. That's important." When Nat didn't respond right away, Shauna looked up. She was met with a look that seemed like half a scowl and half a squint.

"Do you fucking hate me? Is that what's going on here?" Shauna rolled her eyes at the drama of it and set her book down.

"You seriously want me over there every day? You're gonna fucking hate *me* ."

"Yes. I want you there every day. You're my best friend and essentially my only family. I moved up here with the thought that I wouldn't be losing you and now we're here three weeks later and it's like you don't speak anymore." Shauna sighed. Nat playing at her emotions never felt great, even when she was intentionally being dramatic. "I mean you go to class but do you ever fucking participate? I swear to god the only time I hear your voice is when you call your mom." Shauna smiled.

"You're so dramatic holy shit."

"Get your shit, Shipman. It's a Friday night, your books will be there tomorrow. Tonight we're drinking at my place." Shauna laughed and shook her head as she bookmarked her reading assignment and stood up from her desk chair. Nat walked out of her room before Shauna could even question her, leaving her no real choice but to follow.

When Shauna walked through the door, Lottie pretty much attacked her with a hug. "Shauna! Thank god! It's so good to see you, we're so glad you're here." Lottie finally released her and Shauna couldn't help but laugh. They had spent a lot of time together over the summer, but it still felt like Lottie didn't really know Shauna well enough to be this excited to see her. Nat must've been lonely.

"I'm sorry I've stayed away so long." Nat came back in the room with three beers and they sat down as Lottie turned some music on. Shauna had been to their place a few times, but it never stopped shocking her how entirely *theirs* it was. Somehow it matched both of them ridiculously well. A lot more thought went into their decor than just combining their two favorite colors.

"So… I have news," Nat said. Shauna braced herself and looked at Lottie, who seemed a little confused too. "I got a job!" Shauna smiled. She knew that Nat was going to go crazy eventually with all her free time. A job would be great for her. Lottie kissed her on the cheek and Shauna sprung up to give her a hug, ignoring how unaffectionate she might be.

"Congratulations! Where at?" Shauna asked.

"The bar down the street." What? She looked again at Lottie, who again was equally confused.

"You're 18. How the fuck did you get a job as a bartender?"

"Nobody asked any questions. They didn't ID me when I walked in and they pretty much just hired me on the spot. It's tiny and dingy but they play actual good music and nobody tries to talk to me." Lottie looked back at Shauna and she shrugged. As long as Nat's happy then what the hell?

"Well congrats, Nat. Seriously, that's a huge deal." She beamed and took another drink, not seeming super excited about all the attention. They took shots to celebrate and then they took more and before Shauna knew it, she was drunk. She wasn't fun drunk either. Honestly, she wasn't sure if that Shauna existed anymore. She had been waiting very patiently for Lottie to mention Jackie. She knew that she had to have called at least once. It had been three months now since she moved to campus, and Shauna was sure she would've caught Lottie up. She couldn't help it. She needed to know.

"Nat… can I ask your very lovely girlfriend something without you getting upset with me?"

Nat threw her head dramatically back into the couch. "Fucking hell, Shauna. Please just one night with no mention of Jackie fucking Taylor."

Lottie laughed and playfully pushed her head, "Ask me whatever you want to. I might not answer but you can ask."

"Here I was… a fucking dumbass thinking moving away from Wiskayok also meant moving away from her royal highness." Shauna rolled her eyes and laughed.

"You moved in with me knowing I was a fucking headcase over her and you started dating Lot *after* Jackie and her got close. So from where I'm sitting… you actually did sign up for this." Nat glared at her and took a drink of her beer as Lottie laughed and raised her eyebrows for Shauna to continue. "How is she?"

Lottie sighed and looked away for a second, “She’s good. She likes her classes. Managed to get a room to herself. She kind of bailed on the whole sorority plan.” Shauna smiled. She smiled probably a little too hard.

“Good. That’s… really good.” Lottie smiled back. Shauna was really proud of her, not that Jackie would’ve cared. She was happy for her, and at the same time she was so sad that there was this new version of Jackie out there that everybody got to know but her. To Nat’s apparent glee, they decided to cut the Jackie talk for the rest of the night, but Shauna never stopped thinking about her. She wanted to see her again. She wanted to talk to her again. As she passed out on Nat’s couch, all she could think about was that night at her party. Jackie had just… used her. Obviously due to the circumstances it was a little painful, but it was so fucking *hot* . She just took complete control of her body. She fucking used her like a toy. Used her like she was just a way to get herself off. Shauna wanted that again. She wanted Jackie to want her like that again. She fell asleep knowing it was never going to happen and trying not to cry too loudly about it.

Chapter 17

Shauna felt herself starting to slip a little bit the next few weeks. She really tried to throw herself into her writing and her classes and her workouts, but she didn't feel like any of it was working anymore. On what was somewhat of an upside, it made her short stories *so* much better. When her mind went dark, her writing got more raw, more genuine. Her intro to fiction writing professor was certainly a fan. She was the only one in her class with an A by the time thanksgiving break rolled around.

When the three of them walked through the door, Deb had them immediately smothered. Shauna hadn't smiled and laughed so genuinely in weeks. She had *really* missed her mom. Nat carefully delivered the news that she was going to stay at the Matthews' house and Shauna watched her mom really try not to seem too upset. She clearly missed having a full house, and it made Shauna really sad to see it on her face. She had taken the night off instead of thanksgiving night because she couldn't wait for some personal time and although she didn't mention it, Shauna knew she'd get paid overtime rates for working on a holiday. She didn't question it, and instead they drank cheap wine and laughed. She could tell that her mom needed it just as much as she did and at the end of the night they both passed out in the living room.

The next morning, her mom went to work and Shauna went back to the locker room. She found Nat there, clearing out her locker. She must have been moving it into Lottie's house. "Wow it's like the real deal now, huh?" Shauna asked mockingly.

"It's been the real deal." Shauna grinned. Nat not having a sarcastic retort of some kind really kind of solidified it.

"You guys don't fight now that you're together all the time?" Jackie Shauna would. They did. Not enough to ever warrant any kind of distance or separation, though. That would've been way worse than the fights were.

Nat looked up at her and smiled, "Like Lottie could really ever fight with anybody. Really I'm just a dick and then she maybe digs back once and we end up laughing about it. It's seriously probably the only healthy thing I've ever had." Shauna smiled even though deep down she was hopelessly jealous of it. She wanted that and not with a new person, with Jackie. She fucking wanted Jackie.

"Would it be crazy for me to go over there?"

"To Lottie's? No, of course not. You're always welcome." Shauna didn't respond and Nat turned to her and sighed, realizing that wasn't what Shauna had meant. "Yes, considering nobody's home." Shauna's heart sank.

"She didn't come home?" Who's Thanksgiving was she at? Did she go to meet her new boyfriend's family? Did she find a new girl to spend the holidays with? If Jackie wasn't coming home for breaks anymore… then it really was done. If she never came back home,

Shauna was never going to see her again. She started to panic. She felt it deep in her chest and she forced herself to sit down to try to breathe through it.

Nat sighed and sat down next to her, "She had to work, I guess. Tai and Van went up there." Shauna let her head fall into her hands and her breathing became more regular.

"What if she never comes home?" It came out essentially as a whisper and Nat wrapped an arm around Shauna's shoulder.

"Then you'll have us. You'll have me and Lot and your mom. I know we're not Jackie…" Nat said it like she was truly ashamed of it and Shauna's head popped up.

"You know that you're my best friend, right? Probably more so than Jackie ever was. It was never… it was different. For a long time it was different. You are like my sister, and I don't want you to be Jackie. I want you to be you." Nat smiled a little and Shauna knew it was genuine, but it fell off of her face just as fast.

"You're so fucking cheesy, Shipman. Don't you have a workout to spend the next 6 hours on or something?" Shauna laughed and shrugged her arm off. She did indeed spend the next 6 hours on her workout. It was overkill, but she needed it these days. She wondered if Jackie really did have to work or if she just couldn't be in the same town as Shauna. Was she really still this hurt? Had Shauna really done that much damage?

The rest of break was pretty much spent consumed by the weight room and her journal. Her mom essentially had to work the rest of it, but Shauna made sure to catch her up on chores and meal prep for the next week. That way she could at least make sure she was fed and not more overworked than she had to be. She didn't see Jackie once. She knew that she wasn't going to, but still. It fucking sucked. Without knowing it, she had been living for this break and the opportunity to run into her. Now that she realized that might never come she felt… empty. When it was time for her to head back up to campus, Deb cried. Shauna tried not to, but she did too. She drove the three of them back to campus essentially in silence. She could see Nat's eyes baring into her and she knew there was an interrogation coming, but she didn't want to deal with that right now.

Turns out, she didn't want to deal with it ever. She spent the next week isolated in her dorm room. She only ever left to lift and to go to class. She spent every waking moment, which averaged close to 20 a day reading and journaling. Nat would knock on the door, but Shauna was so deep in her own head that she couldn't bring herself to answer it. Eventually, she just picked the lock. She was pissed.

"Shauna I swear to fucking god. Enough of this! Fuck Jackie, fuck this endless punishment you've been putting yourself through, fuck the isolation bullshit. You're coming with me. If you want to shut down you're doing it at my place." Shauna looked at her and watched as she threw some clothes in her backpack and slung it over her shoulder. She couldn't go. She couldn't turn Nat and Lottie's apartment into whatever the fuck Shauna had been using hers for. A hole? A cave? No, she wasn't doing that to them.

"I'm not doing that to you. I'm fine. I'll be okay." Nat's eyes started to fill with tears and she kneeled down on the ground next to Shauna's desk chair.

"You are doing *this* to me, Shauna. You are my best friend and you're hurting and you won't fucking let me in. You let me look like an idiot in front of everybody that lives in this

fucking building knocking on your door every day." Shauna felt guilty. She knew it was wrong to shut her out, but she didn't want to drag her down in it. Nat had been so happy. Shauna couldn't ruin that. Nat put her hands on Shauna's thighs, "Please. For me." Shauna sighed and stood up, closing her journal and the book she had been assigned to read. She put them in her backpack and allowed Nat to lead her out of her dorm room. If Nat wanted her to mope at their place, then that's what she would do.

When she got to Nat's, Lottie had been waiting at the door. "Shauna. Hey. I just want you to know that we want you here. We want you to stay for a little while. My parents just sent me this daybed to go by the window… I made it up for you. I thought maybe it'd be good… for all of us." Shauna smiled a little and nodded. She knew it was a lie. Her parents hadn't conveniently sent her a daybed. More than likely she had asked for the money to buy it, and she had done it specifically for Shauna.

"Thank you, Lot." She nodded and smiled. Shauna laid down on her new bed and Nat sat cautiously next to her. She had worried her. Again she had worried her, "I'm so sorry." Nat rubbed her hand on the side of Shauna's thigh.

"I'm just glad you're here now." Shauna nodded and Nat covered her with a blanket. "You think you could sleep now? Doesn't look like you've been getting much of it. I'll stay here with you the whole time."

Shauna nodded and laid her head back down, finally feeling safe for the first time in days. How had her brain gotten so fucked up again? She had been doing all the right things. She had been working out, she had been journaling. That was supposed to help.

A few days later, Shauna voiced those concerns to Lottie. Nat had gone to work and it was just the two of them. Somehow it felt like she would know how to help. Lottie always seemed to know the answers. "I think… maybe you limit yourself." Shauna waited patiently for more. What did she mean limit herself? Lottie sighed, "Yes journaling is good and exercise is good, but being around people who love you is good too. Maybe you need all of it. Maybe you need to go out and talk to people, even if you don't like them. It's all part of it."

Shauna nodded. Maybe she was right and even if she wasn't, she did buy Shauna a bed just so she wouldn't have to be alone. "Do you want to go visit her? She said they don't ID right?"

Lottie beamed at her, "Yeah, no. We'll be good. I've been a couple times. Let's get ready. Can I do your makeup? You can borrow some clothes."

Shauna took a deep breath, "I'm not trying to be a bitch, I am so beyond appreciative of you… but this a little much. Maybe just a shower and a pair of jeans would be good." Lottie laughed. Only Lottie wouldn't be annoyed at her response to genuine excitement.

"Yes. I will get you a towel and some jeans." Shauna smiled.

"Thank you."

They walked in and Nat literally hurdled the bartop to get to them. She was so excited that she practically knocked Shauna over. She declared drinks on the house and Shauna actually had a good time. She saw a few people who knew her from class and who approached her

with actual admiration. Apparently they had really liked her writings when she shared in class and they wanted to say something but were a little intimidated. Drunk Shauna was apparently less scary than sober Shauna. When they left, Lottie turned to her and smiled. "You're like… famous."

"Oh god, Lot. No. They practically just said I looked like a raging bitch." Lottie laughed.

"They said your work was intimidatingly impressive. They wanted to be your friend, Shauna."

"What? No. They were just being polite."

"Jesus Christ. They were not just being polite, but obviously you don't have to be friends with them either." Nat came back with drinks and they pretty much just dropped it.

When they got home from the bar she couldn't stop herself from asking. "Is Jackie coming home for Christmas?"

Lottie smiled softly, "As far as I know, yeah."

"Is she…" Shauna didn't know what she wanted to ask. Happy? Seeing someone else? As miserable as Shauna was? She settled on, "Okay?"

She watched Lottie search her face, probably trying to figure out what she really wanted to know or what she could handle. "I think you both have some missing pieces right now. You're showing them in… different ways, but," she looked away, trying to find her words without giving too much away, "it wasn't small to her. I don't think it's ever going to seem small." Shauna nodded. She felt the tears coming and before she could even think to stop them, Lottie had wrapped her in a tight hug. She was such a mess. How was she still such a fucking mess?

Shauna pretty much just lived with them until Christmas break. She wasn't doing well, exactly, but she wasn't alone. That counted for something. She really did make an effort to get out more, but she just never really had the motivation for it. She liked being alone in the gym or glued to her journal. It felt like the only things in her life that were just entirely her own. She felt comfortable there, but watching Nat's concern that day she picked her lock and seeing the efforts Lottie had made to make her comfortable all while she had been busy self sabotaging had made her sick to her stomach. It started to feel a little better, but really she just missed Jackie. It didn't take a genius to realize every short story she wrote was either centered around Jackie based characters (perfect and completely out of reach) or around Shauna's life ruining betrayal (spiral of self sabotage until happiness is completely out of reach). It made for good writing, but it was fucking depressing. She was coming to terms with the fact that she might not ever have another chance, as painful as that was.

Her finals flew by. They were mostly just final papers, but she did have a few freshman math classes that she actually had exams for. She went roughly 72 hours without sleep, but was happy with what she was able to submit at the end of her first semester. For one of her classes, she was asked to compare her first writing submission to her last, and Shauna was actually shocked at the way she had grown. She wasn't sure if it was due to the instruction or the deterioration of her mental health or both, but it was something to be proud of for sure.

When they got home, Lottie not-so-subtly made her exit for her little reunion at Jackie's house. Shauna was jealous, but she was trying to hide it. It was so hard to watch Lottie be friends with Shauna's person. It had been Shauna drinking and laughing and sleeping over at the Taylor house her whole life, and now she had to watch Lottie do all of that from afar. She had decided it was always going to be fucking hard. At least she was even in town. Shauna knew realistically there was no real reason for them to run into each other, but just knowing she was nearby was somewhat comforting.

Shauna was drinking her beer and staring at the door Lottie had just closed when Nat drew her attention. "Do you ever think about your dad?"

Shauna snapped her head around to try to get a read on what exactly Nat wanted to know. She just seemed genuinely curious. "I mean… I used to. I don't really anymore though." Nat nodded and didn't say anything more so Shauna continued, assuming she hadn't gotten whatever information she had been looking for. 'It was tough when I was little. Just hard to watch everybody else have a dad who wanted to be there, but when he left it was like my mom came to life.' Shauna smiled, remembering their first Christmakkuh together and all of the times they cooked dinner together when she was young. She didn't have any memories of Deb singing and dancing or laughing or doing all the things that defined that mom that Shauna knew before her dad had left them. "If he never left to start that other family and his new life I never would have gotten to experience the relationship I have now with my mom, and to me that is worth ten of him." Nat nodded, looking off to the distance and Shauna realized what this was. She was thinking about her mom.

"Does he ever call?" Shauna laughed. Her dad had called *maybe* a handful of times in the last decade.

"No. He did a few times when I was young, birthdays when he remembered or when he felt guilty. I maybe got a birthday card or two in the mail." Shauna took another drink and continued, "You thinking about your mom?"

Nat looked at her and nodded. "I just wonder if she thinks about me. I never told her I was moving, and I just wonder if she worries about me."

Shauna nodded. Part of her wanted to tell Nat to just go see her, but part of her knew that there was a chance her mother hadn't even noticed she had left town, and that was something Nat didn't need to know. To a certain point, not knowing probably would've been better. "Do you want to see her?"

"I don't think so. I think it's just Christmas, you know?" Shauna nodded. She did know. Christmas always has a way of making people's absences louder.

"You know you guys are welcome over here. I don't know if my mom's working or not. I'm kind of guessing she is, but either way you're more than welcome to hang out."

"Yeah, maybe we will. I don't know what Lot's got planned." Shauna nodded. She didn't really mind being alone on Christmas. Thanksgiving was kind of peaceful that way. Sure, it was lonely too, but somehow Shauna knew that the more people that came, the more apparent it would be that they weren't Jackie. She just didn't want them to feel alone if they didn't want to be.

“No worries either way. I think it’s nice you guys are starting your own traditions.” Nat smiled at her.

“Yeah, me too.”

They agreed to stay up until Shauna’s mom got off work at 3, which was fun but also a little anticlimactic. Shauna could tell the second she walked through the door that she was exhausted. It broke her heart. She was excited to see them, and tried to put on a brave face but she was in bed within 10 minutes of walking through the door. Nat and Shauna crashed shortly after.

Chapter 18

Shauna spent pretty much all of her break at Lottie's. Apparently, Jackie was the new host of their little group, leaving the Matthews' mansion pretty much unoccupied most of the time. She third wheeled with Nat and Lot anytime her mom was working, which was pretty much constantly. She did end up working both Christmas and Christmas Eve, although she did take some time off the day before to celebrate Christmakuh. It was fun, but like Thanksgiving it was pretty short lived. Her mom spent all of her energy cooking and passed out pretty much right after. Nat and Lottie didn't end up coming over, which ended up being fine. Shauna went and burned off all of the holiday calories instead of calling Jackie. She wanted to know how she was. Of course when she asked Lottie she just got the usual, 'yeah she's good.' which didn't satisfy any part of Shauna. She needed every detail. She needed every possible life update, she wanted to know every time Jackie had even looked at somebody else. She was jealous of fucking ghosts and maybe a little bit of information would help her, but of course she never called. Jackie knew she was home. She knew she was spending time at Lottie's. Jackie knew how to get a hold of her if that's what she wanted, and if she didn't want to talk then Shauna wasn't going to continue forcing herself on her.

The last day of break Lottie was over at Shauna's house trying to convince Nat and her that going to Laura Lee's yellowjacket dinner was important. They looked at each other and felt pretty confidently that they were both uninterested.

"Baby come on. You would seriously rather sit at the diner with *Misty* than go smoke and hang out just the three of us?"

"God don't forget about fucking Mari either." Shauna spit her word out like it tasted bad in her mouth. Nat groaned and threw her head back.

"You guys are ridiculous," Lottie stared at them, very clearly disappointed. "Natty… come on. Please?"

Shauna laughed before Nat could be swayed. *"NATTY?"* Shauna cackled at the nickname and Nat shot her a look. "Oh god, thank you Lot. I'm using that. I'm so using that." Lottie laughed and rolled her eyes.

"Jackie's gonna be there." That got Shauna's attention. She hated Shauna so much she refused to come home for thanksgiving but she was going to go to lunch?

"You're full of shit. She'd never go anywhere I might show up."

"Or maybe she's assuming that you two will be fucking miserable here on this couch and refuse to interact with people you've been friends with your whole lives." Nat looked at Shauna and she knew she was going. Lottie had asked her to. That's all it took.

"She's not even gonna look at me. She'll probably spend dinner sat between Mari and Tai and I'll just spend it getting yelled at." She said it like she wasn't sold on Jackie's attendance alone. She knew she was going.

It looked like Lottie was going to say something helpful or kind, but Nat cut her off, “God forbid somebody *yells at you* .”

“Oh shut the fuck up,” Shauna said with a laugh.

“You’ve got all this self control now, might as well put it to the test, yeah?” Nat said it like it was a challenge. Shauna was cooked.

“Fine. I’ll go. But only if we can smoke and raid your dad’s stash after,” Lottie nodded enthusiastically and dragged them both out of the door. She was so eager that they were the first ones there. Just them and Laura Lee. It wasn’t so bad, really. They sat down and ordered sodas. Lottie seemed excited to catch up and Shauna and Nat were excited to survive dinner so that they could smoke after. It wasn’t long before Misty and Mari showed up, filling the seats on Laura Lee’s side of the table. There were three empty seats left. Tai, Van, and Jackie. Shauna’s heart was beating in her throat waiting for them to show up. Her leg was shaking violently enough to shake the table, and Nat hit her thigh under the table to get her to stop. She hadn’t even realized she was doing it. She took a deep breath and tried to do anything but stare out of the window, but nothing could’ve drawn her eyes away from Jackie as she walked through the door.

Her hair was a little longer, her eyes were somehow brighter, and her smile was just… fucking stunning. So much so that she didn’t even flinch when she went to hug Mari. So much so that it barely hurt when she pretended Shauna didn’t exist. She was wearing a low cut sweater and a pair of jeans. Her collarbones were showing and it was driving Shauna fucking insane. She was staring. She was wanting. She was a lot of things. She sat down at the furthest possible seat from Shauna and never once offered her a glance. Nat kicked her under the table fucking *hard* and drew her back down to reality.

She leaned in and whispered, “You’re fucking drooling. It’s just a sweater, Shipman.” Shauna glared at her and stared down at her menu, trying to concern herself with her order rather than Jackie’s neck or the side of her face. There might not have been any eye contact, but Shauna knew she felt something too. She could tell she was nervous by the way her eyes never really latched on to anyone. They wandered, like she was trying to look anywhere but at Shauna. Nat tried to distract her, “What are you getting?”

Shauna laughed. “A sandwich. They’ve only got sandwiches and salads here.” Nat laughed and looked over her shoulder. Shauna could feel Jackie’s eyes on her. She could feel them on her face and her neck and her arms. Nat raised her eyebrows and whispered, ‘Don’t turn. Let her look.’ Nat smiled a little and Shauna laughed. As much as she liked to talk about Jackie needing to forget her and move forward, she sure seemed to be enjoying this. A couple seconds went by and Nat smiled, “You’re good.” Shauna turned back to look at her. Her face was kind of flushed, like she had been blushing.

The rest of dinner was uneventful. Shauna didn’t talk much and Tai made sure that every opportunity she did have was redirected. Shauna wasn’t really mad about it. She was prepared to stay as silent as necessary for Jackie to never leave. If she opened her mouth or said the wrong thing, maybe they leave early. Maybe Shauna has to go back to existing in different spaces. She didn’t want that. Even if Jackie wasn’t looking at her or talking to her, Shauna needed her presence like it was a drug.

When they were waiting for the bill, Van and Lottie started to whisper about something. Shauna was going to eavesdrop until Laura Lee spoke up. "Shauna, how do you like Brown? Is it great?"

Hmm how was Brown? Was it great? "It's… interesting. There's a lot going on most of the time, but I like it, yeah."

Laura Lee smiled at her, "I'm so happy for you. I always knew God had a special plan for you." Shauna forced a smile, not really sure how to respond to that. If the life she was living right now… or the last 6 months was a special plan from the big man upstairs, then honestly fuck him. Shauna was laughing to herself about it when Jackie's voice snapped her out of it. She listened in, trying to figure out what she was saying without staring at her and making it obvious when she realized… Jackie was talking to her. Her head snapped around to Jackie's eyes bearing into her soul. Her cheeks were red again, and Shauna knew she probably looked the same way.

"Shauna, you can say no, but we're thinking about going to Lottie's later to drink. You can come, if you want." Shauna was too stunned to speak. Instead, she just nodded lamely and watched her turn and walk away. Jackie… invited her to hang out? Jackie… wanted her around? Shauna tried not to smile too hard, but she hadn't felt so happy or excited about something in a *very* long time. She kept her eyes glued on her until long after Tai's car pulled out of the parking lot. Then, she turned slowly to Nat.

She leaned in and whispered, "That was real, yeah?"

Nat laughed at her. "Are you ready to go home? Fuck waiting for this goddamn bill. Nat threw $50 on the table for the three of them and they walked out, followed closely by Van.

"Lot, is this some kind of like trap or something?"

She got laughed at again, "Shauna it's an invite. Just be there. It doesn't have to be anything more than that."

"You need to fucking hydrate," Nat said.

"What? Why?"

"You spent an hour fucking drooling over her, now we've got the whole night too? And you're gonna be drunk. You're gonna be a mess." Lottie playfully hit her shoulder and Shauna couldn't even be mad. Not only did she get to see Jackie today, she was going to actually hang out with her tonight. What could she possible have to be fucking upset about? Really, she was just fucking nervous. She changed quickly at her house and rushed over to Lottie's to get some liquor in her system before Jackie came over. Nat had put a lot of effort into calming her nerves and by the time Jackie walked in, she had three beers and a couple shots running through her system and was feeling pretty relaxed. That definitely didn't stop her from damn near hyperventilating at the sight of her.

She wasn't sure if she had always felt this way about Jackie or if knowing what it was like to live without her had heightened every emotion she had ever had for the girl. She was leaning hard into Van like she couldn't stand up on her own. She was giggling and holding a bottle of tequila that Natalie very happily accepted. She was being nice, Shauna realized. She was grateful for it. As soon as Jackie's eyes landed on Shauna's it felt like they were

pulled away. Tai had demanded that she take shots in the kitchen and the warm feeling in her chest left with her as she walked out of the room.

Jackie and Tai had come back from college with all new drinking games for them to try out. They played flip cup and boom cup and king's cup and all of the cups really, and it was fun. It was a lot more active than their usual drinking games, but it definitely got them drunker too. Shauna found that she really wasn't very good at any of these games. She found that it was *really* hard to focus on all the rules when Jackie kept *looking* at her. Something about her bright hazel eyes on Shauna's body every time she had happened to look away for a second was making her mouth dry up and her brain freeze. Eventually she knew she needed to snap herself out of it. She had to figure out how to exist in a room with Jackie without completely losing her mind. She told everybody she had to pee and went to splash some water on her face and calm herself down. It's just Jackie. She had spent years attached to her hip and practically hated her for it. She could figure this out. She left the bathroom feeling better and more determined and walked to the kitchen to grab another drink. She pretty much ran into Jackie.

She stopped in her tracks. Jackie wanted to hang out, but alone in a room together, the same room they had been in when everything blew up… Shuana wasn't sure how Jackie would feel about that. She hadn't seen her yet, too busy buried in Lottie's fridge looking for something. All she could really see was her legs, and that was honestly enough. Any more and Shauna would probably be stuttering over her words, "Oh, hi. Sorry… I was just looking for a refill…" Shauna was now very aware of how drunk she sounded. Had she been this drunk the whole time? Slurring her words and shit? Jackie jumped a little and looked up at her. She blushed a little and smiled a little and Shauna couldn't help but do the same.

"Yeah, go ahead, take what you need. Can't do much until I find this cranberry juice anyway. Had to have been Tai who used it last…" Shauna laughed. She should've known she was looking for the cranberry juice. Nat's way of organizing a kitchen was a little… unorthodox. Without thinking, Shauna took a step closer to her, reaching around her shoulder to grab it out of the produce drawer.

"It was Nat, she goes months without any fruits or like nutrition, so cranberry juice and drink mixers are about as close as it gets," Shuana laughed until she realized that they were *very* close and Shauna heard Jackie's little gasp and realized how uncomfortable she must have been. She backed away, "Sorry."

Jackie laughed and thanked her, trying to play it off but she wouldn't look Shauna in her eyes. She felt her heart beating in her throat. She hadn't meant to fuck it up already. It got really quiet really fast and Shauna realized how ridiculous it was that she was just standing there waiting for Jackie to say something. She was about to turn around and walk back to the living room when she finally spoke up. It was rushed, like she knew that Shauna was half a second from leaving and she didn't want her to go, "So… how's Brown?" She didn't look up at Shauna, but she was talking to her. She was asking questions about her life. She cared.

Shauna tried not to smile too much, trying to play it cool. She didn't really know how to talk about Brown with Jackie. Really, it was a small point on her list of betrayals, but still. It was something she hid and lied about. She wasn't exactly proud of it. "Um… it's good, you know. Different, but good I think." Shauna looked down at her feet, 'Thank you for asking,' the second part came out quieter, more genuine, and definitely not as cool as she had been

trying to be. Jackie looked up at her and they held eye contact for a while. Shauna was allowing herself to just sit in it and soak it in. Jackie was beautiful, and generally she did seem like she was doing pretty well, but in that moment she just seemed sad. It broke Shauna's heart. "How's Rutgers? Did you end up finding a sorority you liked?" Obviously she knew Jackie hadn't rushed like she had planned, but she didn't want to get Lottie in trouble. She also kind of wanted to hear her reasoning for why. It was all she talked about for years, obviously she had never actually wanted to do it, but still.

"You know, I realized I never really wanted to do it in the first place," Jackie said as she leaned back on the kitchen counter. Her shirt pulled up at the movement and exposed a little sliver of her stomach. Shauna remembered the way her abs had looked and the way they felt on her tongue. She pulled her eyes away as soon as her head went there and she nodded, trying to refocus. Of course she had never wanted to do it in the first place. Right. That's what they were talking about. Jackie continued, "I'm working with event planning now for a community center. Started as volunteer work, but they want me part time now. I like it. It's fun."

Shauna smiled. That just felt like it would fit her. It made the most sense in the world, even though Shauna never would've picked it for her. "Good… good," she looked up and focused her gaze on her eyes. Not her collarbones, not her stomach or her lips or her legs. Her eyes. That was respectful, right? Well… maybe not in the way they did it. She watched Jackie's head start working and it almost looked like she wanted to take a step forward, a step closer, but instead she just looked down at the floor. Shauna cleared her throat, trying to make it seem like she would've done the same thing. Jackie grabbed the drink she had finished making and carried it back out to the living room. Shauna took another shot and grabbed a beer, taking a deep breath as she worked her way out to the living room. Jackie had tucked herself next to Tai and Van, and Shauna sat down on Mr. Matthew's recliner to finish her beer and at least attempt to watch the movie Van had turned on. She found that between the alcohol and the comfort of Jackie being in the same room as her, she had no real problem falling asleep.

Chapter 19

The next morning, Nat had shaken her awake pretty early and reminded her that her mom was leaving for work in an hour. If she wanted to say goodbye before they drove back up to campus that night, they had to head out like right now. Shauna glanced back at Jackie before walking out the door. She wanted to say goodbye. As awkward as she knew it would be, it felt wrong to just leave, but she knew she had to. Jackie wouldn't want to say goodbye anyway. They had one conversation and obviously that was the highlight of Shauna's semester, but for Jackie it definitely wasn't as significant. Her and Nat made their way back to Shauna's house and gave her mom a very tear filled goodbye, surprisingly enough for all parties. Deb had really turned into a mother figure for Nat, and Shauna kind of loved it. She loved that her mom was just automatically filling that gap in all of her friend's lives. It was really good for Jackie at the time, and now it was really good for Nat too. They both had found Shauna's mom when they needed an actual adult to consistently show they cared. It was really important, and Shauna loved her mom for being so willing.

By 4 pm, the three of them were headed back to campus. Shauna thought for a very long time about her night spent with Jackie. It felt so natural and was so unexpected. Jackie didn't hate her, or at least she was making an effort not to. Maybe if Jackie could forgive her for everything that happened, Shauna could too. When they got back to campus, Shauna reacclimated with her living room daybed and started to journal about the whole experience. It was hard to really put any of it into words. Jackie didn't seem exactly eager or comfortable with any of it, but she had still wanted to spend time with her. She still looked at her the way she always had. There was still something there, and Shauna knew she still had a chance to be in her life. Really, that was all she wanted. She just didn't want to live without her anymore.

The next night, Shauna and Lottie made their way over to visit Nat at work. Shauna saw those same classmates and with some gentle encouragement from Lottie, decided to go up and say hi to them. It was kind of intriguing that these people who she had never really noticed or acknowledged knew who she was and admired her. That never happened in high school. It had pretty much always been the other way around. She learned that their names were Matt, Adam and Lauren. They were nice and you know… fine. In other words, they weren't Jackie or Nat or Lottie, but Shauna liked them well enough to get a drink every once in a while. It was good. Even if she didn't love them or feel drawn to them the same way she did with everybody else in her life, it was healthy for her to talk to people in her classes.

Over the first few weeks of the next semester, she found that she was able to connect on an intellectual level more so than she really could with anybody else. Being able to talk to other people who read and write every day and are constantly trying to find something that they feel really connected to was something Shauna never had really expected to enjoy. Her only real issue with the group was that they had no real care or concept of what money was. They were all in nice apartments paid for by their two parent households. Their parents all had graduated from an Ivy, Lauren and Matt both being Brown legacies, and they spent their parent's money like they had no idea what it meant. Lottie was obviously rich and she wasn't

ashamed of it nor did she try to hide it, but she also wasn't throwing away perfectly good food because you found something you wanted more a few blocks up or spending her mom's weekly paycheck on a new jacket. It was wasteful and at times it made Shauna sick to her stomach. She never mentioned it, and instead just started to limit how much time she spent with them or how vulnerable she got with them. She didn't need them to think of her as the poor kid they had to pity, and she struggled to really afford their nights out anyway.

They were good friends to run into at the bar and to talk to in class, and maybe that was all Shauna really needed them to be. Lottie had made a couple good friends in her classes and Nat occasionally spent time with a couple people from work and every once in a while, Lot would invite everybody over to drink and listen to music. It was fun. Shauna had what felt like a real social life for the first time in her entire life.

Combined with her workouts and her journaling, she almost felt like a full person again. She realized as she started to feel better that she had been constantly finding ways to make herself miserable. She had been doing nothing but punishing herself even in ways she didn't realize. She thought that when she worked out longer than usual, it was because she had some extra energy to burn off, but that wasn't it. She was abusing exercise so that she could feel her lungs burn and feel her legs give out underneath her. She pushed herself until her vision blurred or until her ears started to ring. That had never been an outlet, it was an excuse to continue hurting herself. She made an effort to reroute a bit and placed time limits on her gym time. She had split her journaling into two parts, one being her awful unfiltered thoughts about anything on her mind, and the other being unassigned short stories to turn those thoughts and feelings into a character. She found that it helped her find her own rationale when she observed everything from a third person perspective. If she could use everything she felt and create a character she could start realizing that she wasn't evil or horrible or any of those awful things she had been clinging to for the past six months. By understanding this character in her stories she could find ways to better understand her thoughts.

Seeing Jackie capable of still looking at her with love and admiration had allowed Shauna to try to offer that to herself. She started to actually get better. She started to heal in a way. She returned to her dorm room permanently a month into the second semester. She was appreciative of Nat and Lottie and their willingness to help her when she needed it, but she wanted to give them their space back. It was important for them to have that, and it was important for Shauna to live in the dorm room her mom was spending money on. Nat pretty much split nights between her and Lottie when she wasn't working, at times even just sleeping at Shauna's instead of walking home. As much as she gave her shit for it, it was really nice to feel wanted like that. Somebody was willing to go out of their way to just be in the same room with Shauna when she did her homework. That was a special kind of love.

When Lottie left to go visit Tai and Van, Shauna agreed to crash at Nat's all weekend so she didn't get too lonely. She took the weekend off at the bar to hang out with her so they could have their 'own fun,' which was how Nat had phrased it. Shauna knew she was just trying to distract her from the fact that Lottie was with Jackie all weekend. She knew that Nat knew her well enough to understand that's all she'd be thinking about, but that didn't stop Shauna from jumping at the opportunity. Nat convinced her to head over to the club next door to her bar for the first time, and it was a little intimidating. Nat convinced Shauna to let her pick out something to wear and do her makeup, and by the time they left Shauna felt like she didn't even recognize herself. She liked how she looked, though. She felt really pretty.

She felt desirable. Was that Nat's intention or did she just look different enough from herself for Shauna to think she looked pretty? Nat had let her borrow a pair of her black jeans and a top that was kind of loose fitting on Nat, but hugged the fuck out of Shauna's tits. She hadn't realized how much they had grown until her cleavage was popping out of the cut out v neck Nat had freehanded. She looked at herself and then Nat in the mirror, and knew by her grin that it was actually as good as it looked. Sometimes she was unsure. Jackie had spent so much time telling her what to like and dislike that it was hard to figure out what was hers and what was Jackie's sometimes.

They got to the club and Shauna immediately felt out of place. She didn't think it was a gay bar, but it must have been a pride night or something because all the girls had some kind of alternative makeup on and were looking a little too hard at them when they walked in. There were like… no men there, which Shauna had thought was probably the only reason Nat had suggested they come in the first place, and the ones that were there had crop tops and cutoffs on. Shauna didn't question Nat about it, just assuming that she had known and they made their way to the bar. A guy in his late 20s wearing a mesh shirt and eyeliner turned to Shauna and asked what she wanted to drink. Nat cut her off like she knew him and got them a couple beers. Shauna raised an eyebrow and Nat laughed. "We smoke out back on our breaks. Didn't want him to try to ID you."

"I have a fake, you know." Nat exaggerated her surprise as she handed Shauna a beer.

"When the fuck did you get that?"

Shuana laughed, "Jackie got it for me junior year. Her and Jeff broke up and she wanted to go to a bar to find older men to date." Nat rolled her eyes and Shauna laughed. "She didn't end up finding anybody. It was kind of fun, actually. Just us at a bar where nobody knew us. She was just… Jackie, you know?"

Nat rolled her eyes again, "No. I don't know. The Jackie I knew was apparently not the same Jackie you knew." Shauna smiled softly, remembering the way Jackie had gotten too drunk and had spent the night leaned into Shauna's chest just trying to keep herself upright. It was fun. She was kind of sad that the two of them never really got to know each other. Jackie was always so mean to her, and it wasn't exactly like Nat ever made much of an effort either.

"You know *of* the Jackie I knew, though. I really do think you guys would like each other." Nat grimaced and Shauna laughed, 'You guys are really similar.' Nat looked sick, "Seriously. I'm not fucking with you. In another life y'all would be best friends."

Nat shook her head and laughed, "You know a big part of me wanted to make a joke about you coming on to me, but I'm so absolutely fucking *shocked* that you just looked me in my face and told me I was *really similar* to Jackie fucking Taylor that I can't even string the words together." Shauna laughed. She could tell Nat was genuinely a little hurt, but Shauna knew she understood that coming from her, that was absolutely a compliment. They brushed it off and found a seat at the bartop. Shauna wasn't exactly a dancer, and she didn't really feel in the mood for it anyway. It didn't take too terribly long for Nat to have to pee. Shauna laughed at her and promised to save her seat. When she left, Shauna turned and ordered another beer. She drank it in silence, wondering what Jackie was doing. She wondered if they had gone out or if she had found anybody at the bar. The thought of somebody else

touching her or kissing her was enough to make Shauna down her very full beer. She was distracted by somebody tapping on her shoulder.

Shauna turned around to see a girl with dark hair and dark eyes trying to get her attention. She smiled at Shauna and Shauna instinctively smiled back. She was pretty. She was wearing a short skirt and a loose fitting button up, showing just enough of her cleavage to draw Shauna's attention. "Hey, I'm sorry. What's up?" Shauna asked, genuinely curious what she needed.

"Hey… I'm Rebecca. I thought you were really cute and wanted to know if you'd want to dance?" Shauna looked around. No. She really didn't want to dance. She panicked like she was cheating on Jackie or something, even though that was ridiculous. Jackie would never know and would probably never really care either.

"Oh… um, thank you. I think you're really pretty too." The girl smiled a little wider and Shauna felt bad for looking for Nat in the crowd to get help diverting the conversation. She was nowhere to be found.

"I'm sorry… I just am not really interested in anything right now."

Rebecca's eye brows creased and she looked confused, "Your friend just said…" she looked over Shauna's shoulder toward the bathroom and it all clicked. Nat brought her here to try to fucking set her up. She rolled her eyes.

"I'm sorry. I don't know why she did that…" The girl gave her a tight lipped smile and turned on her heel to make her way back to the dance floor. Nat conveniently came back from the bathroom at the same time. She was smiling and Shauna was definitely not. "Are you fucking serious?"

"What? What's wrong?"

"You tried to fucking set me up?" Nat rolled her eyes.

"You were looking at her. I thought it might be good for her."

"What the fuck are you talking about? I have never even fucking seen her before."

"Okay… she was looking at you, but she's hot! I just thought maybe it would be good for you—"

Shauna cut her off, "I think it would be fucking good for you to back off." Nat jumped back a little and Shauna watched her expression change from playful to frustrated.

"I think if I fucking backed off like you want so badly you'd be locked up alone in your fucking dorm room torturing yourself and never allowing yourself to even pursue your own happiness hoping that one day Jackie will fucking look at you again!" Nat was yelling it over the music, and as angry as it might have made Shauna, she was fucking right. She shouldn't have told her to back off. She shouldn't have snapped over something Nat was trying to do to help her. She had no response so Nat continued, calmed down a little and quieter, but not any kinder, "You need to find some fucking self respect. Jackie Taylor is not the end all be all for you. All of these fucking girls gawked over you the second you walked through the door. The dudes in your class are infatuated by you. You need to at least fucking *try."*

Shauna sighed, trying to stop herself from getting defensive for no reason, and she was grateful that Nat gave her the time to respond. "I know you don't get it. I'm sorry that I can't explain it better. The thought of her even *touching* anybody else, even if it's innocent makes me fucking sick. Maybe she's over it. Maybe it never really meant anything to her. Maybe I just helped her to lose her virginity before she got to college, but on the off chance she's feeling the same way, I can't fucking risk hurting her again. It feels like every time I consider it, every time I'm presented with the opportunity or feel a vibe I'm fucking Jeff all over again. I can't do it. I don't want to."

Nat sighed and she shook her head. She didn't know what to say, and Shauna didn't blame her. She sounded fucking pathetic. Nat was right, she had no self respect, but she didn't want any. She wanted to give all of herself to Jackie no matter the consequences of it. It was dangerous and toxic and probably fucking weird, but she couldn't bring herself to care. Shauna suddenly felt really out of place and kind of vulnerable at this bar. She looked at Nat and tried to let her know that she wasn't mad and she didn't want to leave because of her, but just because it felt like it was time. "Can we just go home? Please?" Nat looked like she understood and she nodded, but it still stressed Shauna out. She knew that she was trying to help. She knew that she was right, but she just didn't want to help herself in that way yet. The second she got with someone new it would actually feel… real?

The walk back to Nat's apartment was quiet. Shauna knew she needed to apologize but she just couldn't string the words together. She was pissed that Nat dressed her up and pimped her out at the bar, but she knew it was unreasonable. She hadn't even dated Jackie. It's been what? Six months? She can't even look at anybody else 6 months after her not relationship with Jackie ended. She knew it was pathetic. She knew Nat was probably doing the best thing for her, it just fucking sucked. Nat brought her out of her thought spiral, "I'm sorry. Seriously. I was just trying to help, I didn't realize you'd be so upset about it."

Shauna sighed and stopped at her front door, turning to look at her. "No. I'm sorry. I know I can get mean when I feel threatened and you don't deserve that. I know you were trying to help." Nat raised her eyebrows and smiled a little. She was impressed, and Shauna kind of was too. She realized that what she said was actually kind of… mature. She smiled too and the mood felt 10 times lighter. "You don't need to pimp me out though, seriously. Maybe it's fucking pathetic to sit around and wait to see if Jackie will talk to me, but that's what I want to do."

Nat sighed and unlocked her door, "Can we at least put some kind of timeline on it? Like are you waiting a year? Two? All of college? Please?"

Shauna thought about it. It depended. It all depended. If Jackie never spoke to her again and that one party was enough for her then less, but if they went back to hanging out… maybe forever honestly. Nat stopped as they walked up the stairs, demanding a response. Shauna sighed, "Not all of college."

Nat rolled her eyes, "You're fucking insufferable."

Shauna laughed, "It depends, Nat! I have no idea what she's up to. I have no idea if she's still thinking about me. I have no idea if she's with somebody. I won't waste all of college on it. If nothing changes and everything stays exactly as it is right now then a year from now I will let you pimp me out or do whatever the fuck you want to do. But right now it's not

happening. I can't." Nat paused and looked at her for a second before reaching out and offering her hand to shake. Shauna laughed and took it, solidifying their agreement.

They spent the rest of the weekend drinking and smoking at the apartment. Shauna had homework to do, but she was enjoying the alone time with Nat. One weekend off wouldn't kill her, right?

Chapter 20

Lottie got back at like 3 am and her complete sobriety made it very clear how high Nat and Shauna were. She walked through the door and Nat started giggling like a toddler who was just caught doing something they weren't supposed to.

"Holy shit guys I can smell your weed from outside the fucking building. Have you been smoking all day?"

Shauna looked over at Nat and as soon as they made eye contact they started laughing. Lottie started laughing too, running and jumping over the back of the couch to sit on Nat's lap. She grabbed the joint out of Nat's hand and hit it a few times, refusing to give it back afterwards.

"You guys do not need any more of this shit. Seriously y'all are fucking crazy." Shauna laughed and watched them. Nat reached up to push the hair out of Lottie's face and there was a unique shine in her eyes when they looked at each other. Shauna loved them like family. Nat deserved this. She deserved to be happy. She deserved someone to treat her the way she deserves to be treated.

"So… how was your weekend?" Shauna asked, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. Nat rolled her eyes and Lottie tilted her head to the side.

"It was good. I had a really good time." Shauna smiled and nodded, taking that as a sign Lottie didn't want to share. She knew what Shauna was asking and chose to ignore that. Shauna could respect that. Lottie laughed at her.

"What do you want to know, Shauna?" Shauna looked at Nat, who shook her head a little bit. She hated when Shauna put Lottie in the middle of her shit, but Lottie had put herself there this time. She had offered.

"How is she? Is she happy?"

Lottie smiled sadly. Shauna always asked that question. She was aware that the answer probably wouldn't change week to week, she just needed to be sure. "I think she is. I think she found herself at Rutgers. It's been good for her."

Shauna smiled. She was genuinely so happy for her. She laughed at herself. She was so dumb, sitting here asking about her and feeling this excited for her when she probably wanted nothing to do with her. "Does she ever ask about me?"

Lottie smiled more genuinely this time. She looked at Nat and laughed a little bit. "You guys are both fucking ridiculous, yes. She asks about you."

Shauna was intrigued. Jackie asked about her? Why had she never really even thought about that before? "What does she ask?"

Lottie sighed and took another hit. It looked like she was debating what to say. "The same stuff pretty much. How you are, if you're happy… if there's somebody else." Shauna

couldn't stop the smile from spreading over her face.

"She asks if there's somebody else?" Lottie smiled and nodded. Nat rubbed her face with her hands. Shauna smiled and then started to think that maybe she only asked because she had been. Maybe she was projecting. Maybe she was seeing someone.

Her smile faded and Nat noticed it, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing… I just— is there somebody for her?"

Shauna looked up at Lottie and her expression was an answer. There was. Shauna's heart sunk in her chest. She felt like she was going to puke. There was someone else. Someone else was touching her. Someone else was kissing her and making her smile. Shauna sighed, letting her mind run. She was probably with them right now. She probably got back from Tai's place and beelined to them. She wanted them.

Lottie sighed, "They're not dating. She says it's nothing. It probably is."

Suddenly she was sitting up very straight and her eyes were trained on the ground. She felt sober despite the four hours she had spent smoking and drinking that day. "Oh." Shauna couldn't form any more words. Her heart was beating faster than it ever had and she suddenly wished she had never asked the question.

Nat took a deep breath and sat down next to her. Shauna knew that she had to feel good about being right. Maybe Shauna should've just gotten with that girl. Maybe she should've given Lottie something to tell Jackie about. She braced herself for the 'I told you so' but all Nat did was wrap her arms around Shauna's shoulders. "I'm sorry," she whispered. Shauna felt her face get hot and tears start to well up in her eyes, but she refused to cry over this. They had never dated. They hadn't been anything resembling friendly in months. She couldn't be upset. She had fucking ruined this. Jackie deserved somebody that made her feel good, and if she's fucking happy now with this new person and that's who can love her without ruining her life… maybe that was just how it was supposed to be.

Shauna took a deep breath. She needed to show them that she's not as fragile as she used to be. "No um… that's good. I showed her that I can't love her without hurting her. I'm glad she found somebody—" Fuck this was harder than she thought. She choked the last words out like it was actually painful, "I'm glad she found somebody to make her happy."

She looked up at Lottie who was looking at Nat. She had that same look like she didn't know exactly how to say something. Shauna followed her gaze to Nat. They were communicating somehow because Nat was shaking her head no. "What? What are you guys talking about right now?"

"We didn't say anything. Nothing." Nat said, but it was clear that her and Lottie had just gotten done talking about fucking something.

"I can handle it. Please just tell me the whole thing," Nat looked at her straight faced, making it clear she had no intention of it so Shauna looked at Lottie. Lottie let her eyes fall on Shauna and she knew there was more. What the fuck more could it be? Lottie looked back at Nat and then to Shauna again, who felt like she was losing her fucking mind.

"Apparently… I haven't seen her, so don't read into this." Her? Somehow knowing it was a girl made it worse. She didn't expect that. She expected a man, someone comfortable.

Maybe Jackie really had changed, and if that was true maybe she was actually moving on. Lottie continued, “I could be wrong. They could’ve just been fucking around and maybe it doesn’t even mean anything…” Shauna was ready to jump her with how slowly this information was coming out of her. Finally, she finished the sentence, “Apparently she looks like you.” Shauna choked on her own breath, ignoring Nat’s disappointed sigh on her shoulder.

“She told you that?” Did she seek somebody out because she’s still attracted to her? Shauna had noticed her looking over break, but still. Was Shauna just her type in women? Or was she trying to find a replacement of some kind? Was it fucking awful to hope that she wasn’t moving on or wasn’t as happy as she seemed and that she was still searching for Shauna in this new girl? Probably. That’s probably the exact reason Jackie was better off.

“No. Van did.” Shauna’s heart sank again. This fucking sucked. The up and down. Van had met her?

“Van met her?”

“Yeah. Tai and Van went to visit a few weeks ago.”

“And she was just over at Jackie’s place or what?” Shauna could feel herself getting angry. She knew she was getting too upset. She knew it was unfair to Lottie and to Jackie, but the thought that somebody else felt so comfortable in Jackie’s space or Jackie was so excited to show them off made her fucking blood boil. It’s nothing but she’s showing her off to her friends? It couldn’t be fucking nothing.

“She works at a bar they went to and then I think they hung out a little bit after that.” Shauna nodded, thinking about this girl in Jackie’s fucking bed. She was seething. She just wanted to fucking scream and she knew it was all her fault. She knew that she had fucking done this, and that made it so much worse. There was no one to scream at, no one to hate but herself. She took a deep breath, stopping herself from getting angry with Lottie because it definitely wasn’t her fault.

“Thanks, Lot. Thank you for being honest with me.” Lottie nodded and Shauna rested her head in her hands, trying to just breathe. She felt Nat’s hand on her back rubbing in circles and she knew it was late and that she should be tired, but she needed to go for a run or lift or something physical. She needed to feel her body put under the same stress her heart was.

“What do you need right now?” Nat asked her.

“I think I just need to go for a run.” Nat nodded.

“Can I come with you?” Shauna looked up at her. Nat wanted to run? Nat hadn’t exercised since they lost Nationals.

“Seriously?” Nat’s jaw dropped like she was offended and Shauna laughed a little. “You know I’m talking about like several miles. Like more than one.”

“You don’t think I can keep up?” Nat asked. Lottie snorted, apparently trying really hard to hold back a laugh. She turned and laughed with her jaw dropped at Lottie now. “Wow. Okay well fuck me I guess for not wanting you to go run by yourself at 4 am.”

Shauna laughed, “No, no. Okay. There’s a circle trail. You can sit on a bench and I’ll run right past you every half mile. Would that ease your mind?”

Nat sighed, “Yeah sounds good. I was kind of dreading the run anyway.” She laughed with the rest of them and kissed Lottie goodbye. Lot was exhausted and headed right to bed as they made their way to the trail.

Shauna spent the next 48 hours wide awake. She wasn’t trying to, and she actually put a lot of her time into exercise just hoping she’d feel tired enough to fall asleep, but every time she closed her eyes she thought about Jackie’s hands on another girl. It was so much worse than when it was Jeff. It was so much worse than that. Nat had asked if she had gotten any sleep, and she had lied. She didn’t want them to stop telling her things about Jackie. That was the last thing she wanted, and if Lottie knew how destroyed she was with the little information they had trusted her with, she’d probably never tell her anything ever again. She felt bad, but she couldn’t risk it. She needed Jackie in her life in any way she could get her. If it was just storytelling from Lottie then that would at least be better than nothing.

She went to class on the second day of no sleep and sat next to Lauren, Matt and Adam. They had pretty much the same schedule in their second semester and while Shauna never really felt drawn to spend much time with them, they were still good to bounce ideas off of. Shauna never really felt creative. She was more comfortable rewriting her own story in different contexts and Adam and Lauren were really good at taking her ideas and making them more dynamic.

After class Adam grabbed her arm and without thinking Shauna snatched it out of his grip. She turned and he threw his hands up innocently. “Woah, woah. I’m sorry I didn’t mean to—” Shauna stared at him trying to figure out why the fuck he was trying to touch her and he continued, “Sorry. I just wanted to ask if you’re okay. You seemed a little… off I guess.” Shauna shook her head. She was being a bitch and she needed to refocus a little.

“Fuck sorry. I didn’t mean to be bitchy. I’m good.” Adam nodded cautiously but didn’t leave. He just looked at her.

“I— um… I don’t believe you.” He laughed a little and Shauna squinted at him. What the fuck? Didn’t he understand he was supposed to leave after she was mean to him? “What are you doing right now? Do you want to get a drink? On me.”

Shauna had no plans. She had thought about going for a run or working out but alcohol sounded so much better. She thought about it for a second and considered just going to the bar alone, but there really weren’t that many bars near campus and if he went and saw her there that would make the rest of her college career pretty awkward. Finally, she accepted. He smiled a little too wide and Shauna started to regret her decision. Had Lottie been right? Was this gonna turn into a date thing? Fucking Christ, she hoped it wasn’t a date thing.

He suggested Nat’s bar, which made Shauna kind of grateful she didn’t decide to ditch him. They sat down and ordered. Shauna drank half of it before she turned to look at him. He laughed and raised his eyebrows. Shauna really hadn’t looked at him before. He had dark curly hair with dark eyes and a wide smile. He definitely wasn’t ugly, but he also wasn’t Jackie. Shauna knew that Lauren liked him, but he never really seemed interested. She really had thought he was gay until she caught his eyes flickering to her tits the one day she had decided to wear a low cut shirt to class. The shirt really wasn’t even low cut, it was just

small. Her arms, shoulders, thighs and tits had all grown pretty drastically with her new lifestyle and she found that a lot of her clothes felt tight in more areas than just one. Lately she had resorted to wearing nothing but baggy band tees and sweats, which she really didn't mind anyway.

"Thirsty?" Adam asked with a grin.

"Something like that," Shauna said, looking behind the bar. She didn't know if Nat was on the schedule today and she kind of hoped she wasn't. She didn't want her and Lot thinking she was on a date.

"Your friend works here, right?"

"Yeah, Natalie. We played soccer together in high school," Shauna responded. She took a deep breath. She needed to not be a total bitch right now and try to at least be friendly.

"Oh wow. Soccer, huh?" Shauna nodded and took another sip. Adam continued, "I could never. No offense… seems like that would suck."

Shauna laughed. It did kind of suck, but she couldn't have imagined her life without it. "It was good for me. Good for both of us, I guess. You didn't play any sports?"

Adam laughed and looked down kind of embarrassed, "Nah, I was pretty much the art geek of my high school."

"Art? And now you're in English Lit?" Shauna asked. She realized after it came out that she had never actually asked him a question before this.

"My dad didn't exactly approve of art as a career." Shauna laughed unintentionally, because English Lit was just as bad. Adam laughed too, "I know, I know. It was the only thing that felt tolerable on the list of majors here. I love to read, I used to write poetry and stuff in high school so it just felt like my best bet." Shauna nodded and finished her drink. He was smiling at her too much. She didn't want him. She didn't want this to feel like a date. She wondered if this was what Jackie and her new girl did. Did they come to a bar and sit and talk and laugh? Fuck.

"Listen…" Shauna started the sentence with the intention of telling him it wasn't a date and she had no interest in him whatsoever, but Nat interrupted her.

"Shauna? What are you doing here at 4 pm on a Tuesday?" Shauna laughed and watched her eyes move over to Adam, "Rough class?"

"When isn't it?" Adam laughed and Nat looked back at her with raised eyebrows. Shauna shook her head and Adam continued, "I got torn to fucking shreds over my use of past tense instead of present today. Of course Shauna got nothing but praise but I thought she could celebrate while I drowned my sorrows." Shauna looked at him. What the fuck was he talking about? She realized she really didn't pay him any fucking attention. He got bad critiques today and she didn't even know while he was noticing the three word praise Shauna had gotten. Interesting.

"Want another?" Nat asked her. Shauna shook her head.

"No, I should probably get back actually. I've got some reading to do." Nat nodded and Shauna looked at Adam. "Thanks, though… for the drink." Adam smiled and nodded. As

Shauna stood up and walked to the door, Nat trailed her behind the bar top.

"Hey," Nat leaned over the bar and looked at her. She prepared herself to get the date questions and whatever else, but all Nat did was reach out to grab her arm and raise her eyebrows a little concerned, "Get some sleep, okay?" Shauna should have known she would know. She smiled softly and hopefully reassuringly and nodded. Nat squeezed her arm and let her head out the door.

Shauna went to the gym for a light workout before falling asleep for the first time in a long time.

Chapter 21

Shauna spent the next few days restabilizing and getting back into a routine before heading back over to reappear at Nat and Lottie's apartment. Her and Nat were chilling on the couch listening to the new Elliott Smith album when Lottie came out of the bedroom.

"Okay so since apparently we're already in our feels tonight…" she turned to Nat, "We gotta tell her."

Shauna sat up, "Tell me what?"

Nat sighed, "Jackie, Tai, and Van are staying with us over spring break." Shauna's heart started beating a little too fast.

"What were your plans for break?" Well… before she learned who was coming to campus she was gonna go home, but now her plans had officially changed.

"Um… I was gonna just try to catch up on homework and stuff," Shauna thought about Jackie being asleep in her little daybed and she felt her face flush. She refocused, "You won't have to worry about me. I'll stay out of your guys' way."

"I'm not asking you to like give us the apartment, honey. I just wanted to warn you," Lottie said, and Shauna knew that she meant it. She nodded and Nat nudged her.

"I'll come entertain you. We'll hang out." Shauna smiled. Maybe Jackie did just want space from her. It would probably be weird if Shauna hung around anyway, and the last thing she wanted was to push too hard and push her away.

"I'm sure they'll want to go to the club anyway, so I doubt you'll really run into them." Shauna nodded. The club. Jackie's gonna be at the club. She's gonna be dancing… at the club. Yeah, that was fine. That was okay.

"You good?" Nat asked.

"Yeah. I'm good, guys seriously." Nat nodded and turned to Lottie.

"Yeah, she's got Adam now anyways." Shauna smacked her arm playfully.

"I DO NOT want Adam, bro. I needed a drink and was scared to blow him off and end up at the same place, which I obviously would have." Lottie laughed and Nat raised her eyebrows.

"Needed a drink because…" Shauna rolled her eyes. Maybe the constant image of Jackie underneath somebody else? The thought of her hands on somebody else? The thought of her using somebody else to get off the same way she had used Shauna? So many reasons to drink.

"The same reason you need a drink whenever you do. Long day, that's all." Nat nodded and looked at Lottie, who thankfully changed the vibe.

"Speaking of. I could use one I think. Anybody else?" Shauna and Nat both raised their hands and Lottie rounded the corner to the kitchen.

"Seriously… if you want to talk about stuff I'm here. You know that, right?" Shauna nodded and rested her head on Nat's shoulder.

"Yeah I know. Thanks. I swear to god it isn't like that with him though. I really am not at all interested." Nat nodded and took their drinks from Lottie, handing one over to Shauna. The rest of the night was spent laughing once Lottie changed up the music. She claimed the two of them didn't need any help being sad, which was probably true. Shauna had a few too many and ended up on her day bed. She wondered if Jackie would be able to recognize her scent on it or if she'd leave her own behind. She let her mind race back to that last time they had sex. Jackie had just… taken complete control. She had used Shauna like she was a means to an end and had made herself cum all over her fucking face. She had been so *aggressive* . Shauna craved it. She craved her.

The next week was spent deciding how to approach this. She wanted to see her, obviously, but she didn't want to push her away. By the time spring break came around, she decided that Jackie obviously knew she was around, and if she wanted to see her she would make the effort to. She could ask Lottie or Nat at any point to invite her over or to invite her out with them if that's what she wanted. She realized that would probably fucking kill her, especially if she went the whole week without seeing her. Even so, she knew it was the right thing to do, and she owed Jackie that. At this point, proving to her that she could do the right thing was probably the most important thing. Nat was proud of her, and decided to devote herself to being Shauna's distraction for the week, which she was grateful for.

She had spent more time with her friends from class. She found out they all had plans to go home for spring break, which was a little disappointing. She really was just gonna spend the whole week in her bedroom. Nat worked, so she could go visit her but really other than that she had no plans. She spent the first half of the week sleeping in, running to the gym, working out for 3-4 hours to prevent herself from literally sprinting over to Nat's place, and then journaling and reading or doing homework until she reached a good stopping point. She'd shower and then go over to Nat's for a couple hours before she closed. Nat came by usually while she was doing homework just to talk, listen to music or sit together until she had to go to work. She made it clear early on she wasn't answering any questions about Jackie, which was probably for the best, but it was killing her. Three days into spring break she was losing her mind. Nat told her she should try to have some fun.

"Listen, just hear me out! You don't have to talk to anybody. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do, but just get dressed up you know? Do something to make yourself feel good. They usually come in kind of early like 10 to say hi and then they go over to the club, so do what you will with that information… but just have fun. Drinks on me tonight."

"Are you encouraging me to be there when Jackie shows up at 10? You think that's a good idea?"

"Jesus Christ Shauna I have no fucking clue what a good idea is with you," Shauna laughed and Nat continued, "But you're losing your shit and I see that. If you need to just see her and have a conversation with her then do that and move forward." Shauna considered it.

She did *really* want to see her and she wanted more than anything to talk to her, but did Jackie want to see her? Did Jackie want to talk to her?

"Has she mentioned me?" Nat rolled her eyes.

"I haven't really been hanging around. I play nice for Lottie but they're not exactly my favorite people."

"So… no?" If Jackie had asked about her, then Shauna would take that as her being interested in innocently running into her at the bar.

Nat sighed, "I'm sure she has. Lottie told me it's pretty much the first thing she asks every time they see each other." Shauna tried not to smile. She just nodded and looked down at her paper. "You are fucking gross, actually." Nat laughed and Shauna threw an eraser at her.

When Nat left for work, Shauna went to the gym. She worked some of her anxiety about seeing Jackie again out of her system and ran back home to shower. She looked at herself in the mirror. She looked different than she did in high school. She looked different from the pictures on her walls and her desktop. Her face was slimmer, her hair was longer. Her thighs and her arms were bigger but also more toned than they were then. Her tits had grown like three cup sizes, and her stomach was more solid. She wasn't as soft as she was. She was strong and she was grown. She was more confident now in her body and the way she looked, and for the first time in a long time she actually got herself ready for a night out. She wanted to look good. She straightened her hair, did her makeup, and put a short skirt on. She managed to find her best fitting bra and put that and a white tank top on. She gave herself a once over and realized it probably looked like she was trying a little too hard. She was making it obvious. She grabbed her favorite flannel and threw it on over, making it look a little bit more casual. She put a pair of black boots on and made her way to Nat's bar. She got there around 9. "You're early," Nat said without looking up. She poured a shot of rum and set it on the bar top. Shauna shifted, suddenly feeling uncomfortable with the amount of effort she had put in. She waited for the jab to come, but all Nat did was hand a beer over too, "You look nice, Shauna. You're gonna stop her in her tracks." Shauna smiled and took the shot.

"Thank you." Nat nodded.

"Your guy was here earlier," Nat said, raising her eyebrows at her. "How much does he know?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean…" Nat leaned over the bar, offering her another shot, "If he runs into Jackie, or more importantly, runs into you *looking* at Jackie… is that something you're prepared for? You're not exactly subtle." Shauna was confused why this was a conversation. Why the fuck did it matter what he did and didn't know.

"Genuinely, Nat. I could not care less." Shauna took the shot and Nat nodded. "What the fuck was he doing at a bar earlier than 9 on spring break?" Shauna asked with a laugh.

"I assumed he was looking for you." Shauna's smile faded and she rested her head in her hands.

"Seriously?" Nat laughed and nodded.

"He left like a half hour ago. He had like one drink, looked around and headed out."

"God I think I hate him, actually," Shauna said with a laugh. Nat smiled and shook her head.

"I kinda picked up on that, yeah. He's nice though."

"He is, I guess." The bar started to get busy and Nat had to actually do her job, only stopping by to give her refills.

Shauna sat alone so nervous that she spent the 45 minutes until Jackie got there drinking 4 more beers. She was sitting at the point right before the world starts spinning when she saw Nat's eyes look up at the door. She smiled and Shauna watched them light up. It had to be Lottie, and with Lottie came Jackie. Shauna felt her heart beating in her throat and her hands started to shake. Nat looked at her and nodded, handing over another shot and Shauna took a deep breath before downing it. She wanted with everything in her to turn around and look at her, but she had Nat's cover to protect. She couldn't make it seem like she planned this.

"Natty baby! How's business tonight?" Lottie said, placing a hand on Shauna's shoulder, *finally* allowing her to turn to see Jackie. She gasped. Not loud or even really noticeable, but she couldn't help herself. She had this… dress on. It was tight and black and hung low, exposing her chest and her collarbones. Her hair fell loosely around her face, framing it in the most beautiful way Shauna could have ever imagined. She had pink lipstick on that drew Shauna's eyes down and glued them to her fucking lips. She looked *so* fucking good.

Shauna felt it run through her body when Jackie's eyes fell on her, "Hey, Shipman. Good to see you." It was good to see her? She was glad Shauna was here? Had she been thinking about her? Had she been hoping to run into her? Shauna looked her up and down again. She knew it was wrong, but she let her eyes linger on her thighs, her chest, collarbones, neck. She looked at her lips again and found herself licking her own. She would do fucking anything to taste her again. She realized she needed to actually respond.

"Hey— hi, Jackie… you look—" Shauna immediately stopped herself. The next words out of her mouth definitely weren't going to match the casual vibe she had been going for. Fuck. She continued, "I didn't know you were coming tonight, sorry. I didn't mean to crash your plans." Jackie quickly looked her up and down and then they locked eyes. Shauna felt her chest rise and fall but it didn't really feel like she was breathing.

Jackie blinked at her and Shauna just sat there, waiting. She just wanted to watch her. She just wanted to observe her. Jackie Taylor was so fucking perfect, Shauna just wanted to look at her the rest of her fucking life. "No, Shauna." Even just the way she said her name entranced her. Jackie looked down and Shauna took a deep breath and another sip of her beer, 'You're good. We're just here to pregame.' Shauna watched her look back up, meeting her eyes again. They were so bright, but so cautious. Shauna could tell she was a little uncomfortable. It stung a little, but she was grateful for the eye contact anyway. "And it's your turf anyway, so no worries." Shauna nodded and took another drink. She was trying not to be too pervy, but it was like every time Shauna managed to pull her eyes away from Jackie's, they found her lips or her collarbones or her thighs. No matter how hard she tried she couldn't peel them off of her. Jackie cleared her throat and Shauna looked up to find Nat and Lottie just staring at them. Lottie looked scared and Nat just looked entertained.

At Jackie's encouragement, Lottie turned to Nat, "3 shots of vodka, please." Nat winked at Shauna and turned to grab the bottle. Shauna took a deep breath and finished her beer. She was drunk. She was definitely drunk.

Jackie turned back to her, "Are you headed next door too tonight?" Was that an invitation? Shauna had been there like three times and she hated it every time.

"Oh no, not really my scene, you know?" Jackie smiled softly and Shauna's chest felt warm. She smiled too, "I usually just keep Nat company." Nat came back with their shots and another beer for Shauna. She thanked her and watched Jackie down the first one. She watched her swallow and smile as she downed the next one too. A little drop ran from the corner of her mouth down her neck. Shauna wanted to lick it off of her so fucking bad. She wanted to taste it. She wanted to taste the two of them together, but she refocused as Van and Tai walked up behind Jackie. Shauna took a deep breath, ready for their next argument.

"Shauna! We were wondering when we'd run into you. How have you been?" Van greeted her with more kindness and enthusiasm than expected.

"Oh… hi. I've been good, yeah." Tai nodded at her, which again, was much nicer than she had expected.

"Y'all ready to head next door?" Tai asked them, looking away from Shauna almost immediately, showing that she was not invited. Shauna laughed and took another drink. Jackie cheered with her arms over her head and they walked out of the bar. Shauna rested her forehead on the bar top.

"This is never gonna end, is it?" Nat asked, laughing at her and pouring her another shot. Shauna glared at her and took it without hesitating. "I'm gonna have to carry your ass home, aren't I?"

Shauna shook her head, "No, no. This is my last one. You don't have any room left in that little apartment."

Nat laughed again, "How are you doing?" She slid a glass of water over to her.

"I…" She laughed at herself and Nat raised her eyebrows, "This is gonna be TMI, probably…"

Nat covered her face with her hands, "You're drunk, but go ahead."

"I like… *need* her. I can't take my eyes off of her. I can't stop thinking about her. I think this is how I'm gonna be for the rest of my life, actually." Nat sighed and Shauna laughed, 'I mean… fuck. Did you see her? That dress? Jesus Christ.' She drank her water and she thought about the club. Shauna hated it because she hated other people touching her. She hated other people looking at her. She hated feeling like she's supposed to do those things with other people… But Jackie was there. Jackie was doing all of those things. Jackie had been so excited to do all of those things. Shauna's mind jumped to everything she was doing over there. "I think I'm gonna go next door."

Nat shook her head. "That doesn't feel like a good decision," Shauna finished her water and looked up at her. It probably wasn't one. "And do what?"

"Just to see." She stood up and Nat grabbed her arm.

"To see what? She's at a club, Shauna. We both know she's dancing."

Shauna shook her head. She wanted to see it. "I gotta know. She practically invited me, anyway."

"Was that what that was?" Nat asked with a small laugh. Shauna laughed too and walked out the door. The cold air hit her face and she used it as a reminder to breathe. She handed her fake to the bouncer at the club and they let her in. Her eyes scanned the crowd and she couldn't see her at first, but she could see Lottie at the bar, sitting alone. Shauna took the empty seat next to her and continued scanning the crowd.

"What are you doing here?" Lottie asked. She seemed a little shocked, and Shauna couldn't really blame her.

"Probably making a bad decision. I won't do anything. I just… wasn't ready yet." As she finished saying it her eyes landed on Jackie. She was in the crowd with a blonde girl wearing next to nothing. Jackie's hands were on her hips. She had a big smile on her face and her cheeks were flushed. Lottie kept talking but Shauna couldn't hear her. Her focus was now entirely trained on the way Jackie's hands moved up this girl's body. The way her hips moved against her. Shauna felt her angry start to boil in her gut, and then Jackie's eyes found her. She felt the hair on her arms stand up and watched Jackie's eyes light up as they found hers. She smiled and all Shauna could do was watch. She wanted to feel Jackie on her. She wanted to touch her. She wanted to be reminded of the way her skin felt. She wanted to make her breath hitch and she wanted to make her moan. She wanted to be the one to make her cum. She wanted to be the one to make her feel good. Not her new girl and not this random bitch pressed against her.

Shauna was leaned forward, like Jackie had been pulling her from across the room. Jackie grinned and turned the girl around by her hips. Jackie pulled her ass back into her thighs and held Shauna's eye contact as they danced and ground against each other. Shauna was fucking mesmerized by her. Her face was hot and her blood was fucking boiling. Jackie's hands moved over the girl's stomach and her mouth hung open. Her lips pressed into the girl's neck, just staring at Shauna the whole time.

Shauna was seconds from sprinting across the room and making this new girl feel her anger. Pressed against Jackie right fucking in front of her? She clenched her jaw and felt every one of her muscles tense. She held Jackie's eye contact and took everything that she would give her. In a way, it felt like it was all for Shauna anyway. Jackie was putting on this little show just for her to see. It fucking killed to see her touching and dancing with this girl, but she would take whatever she could get from her. She got this little bit more of her, and even if it hurt she was going to enjoy it.

It seemed like it was pissing Jackie off that Shauna wasn't starting a fight, and Shauna took that as a challenge. She was fucking angry, and if it pissed jackie off even a little to see her refusing to react then it felt like it was only fucking fair. Jackie moved her hands over the other girl's thighs and up her hips. Shauna watched as the girl's hands reached up to grab Jackie's face over her shoulder. She bit the inside of her cheek and watched Jackie's eyes roll back a little. Shauna could have fucking killed someone. She could've gotten fucking violent, but instead she watched. Instead, she watched this girl grind her ass into Jackie and she watched Jackies mouth opened in what looked like a fucking moan before Van moved

behind her and pulled her away. Jackie's eyes left Shauna and she turned to talk to Van. Shauna relaxed as the girl she had been dancing with disappeared in the crowd and she felt Lottie's hand on her thigh. Shauna looked up at her and Lottie offered a soft sympathetic smile.

"She's just having fun, you know?" Lottie said, rubbing her thumb over her skin.

"Yeah, I know. I can't bring myself to have fun like that, though. It's my fault… just sucks. I'm gonna head home, okay?" Lottie nodded and Shauna made her way out of the bar. It was a couple miles to her dorm room, and she spent the whole walk deep breathing. When she got to her dorm room, she changed and collapsed onto her bed. She didn't feel drunk anymore. She just felt fucking tethered to Jackie. She wondered if she was going to find that girl again and go home with her. She wondered if she would kiss her. Maybe she'd find somebody entirely new.

Shauna thought back to the last time they had sex. She remembered the way Jackie's hands felt on her body, the way she interrogated her and punished her while making her feel so fucking wanted and needed all at once. Her hand reached down to touch the skin on her stomach and she remembered the way her lips felt against her neck. Shauna let her hand wander down past her underwear and apply pressure on her clit. She moaned softly thinking about the way Jackie's hands tugged on her hair and the way it felt to be completely under her control. She imagined Jackie pinning her down and climbing on top of her. She started rubbing her clit in circles as she tried to remember the way Jackie tasted when she rode her. She used her other hand to pinch her own nipple, trying to muffle her moans. She thought about pulling that sexy black dress up to her hips and fucking her right there on the dance floor. She fantasized over the thought of Jackie moaning in her ear. She felt her orgasm building as she thought about all the ways Jackie had ever fucked her. She thought about her lips and her tits and her fucking tongue and she felt her body uncoil and her limbs start to shake. She let her orgasm roll through her, trying to ignore the fact that it was probably wrong to fuck herself to thoughts of Jackie after everything they had been through. She felt her body relax and her breathing slow before falling into a deep and surprisingly peaceful sleep.

Chapter 22

The next morning she woke up to Nat knocking on her door. “Shauna! Are you alive?” Shauna groaned and looked at her alarm clock. It was almost noon. She rolled out of bed and threw a pair of pajama pants on before opening the door and collapsing back into bed.

“How are we doing today? Lot caught me up,” Nat sat on the edge of Shauna’s bed. “I was kinda hoping you’d check back in before heading home. I don’t like that you walked back alone.”

Shauna sat up and looked at her, “I’m okay. I mean… she cares, right? She wouldn’t damn near fuck somebody else with her eyes locked on me if she didn’t care. Even if she was just trying to piss me off… I feel like that means something.”

Nat sighed, “Regardless of all that… are you okay?”

Shauna smiled at her, “I’m good. I feel good.” Nat tilted her head.

“I don’t want you falling apart over this shit. Please. You’ve been good lately,” Shauna thought about it. She had felt better. She had felt more whole, and it really all started at that dinner when she saw Jackie again.

“I know you probably think I’m dumb, but I think I only feel like a real person when she’s around. I’ve gotten better since we’ve started being friendly or whatever. I think that means something,” Shauna looked out her window and they sat in silence for a minute. ‘You have the night off, right?’ Nat nodded. “You wanna smoke or something? Go for a walk? Get pizza?”

“Fuck yes, actually. I was kind of dreading them wanting to go out to the bar again and I would’ve felt bad just staying back. Yes. I would love to smoke and eat pizza instead.” Shauna laughed and they spent a half hour or so just catching up before Nat convinced her to shower. Shauna went for a walk and Nat smoked on the trail while she did laps. When Shauna went to the gym, Nat went back to the apartment. Shauna did a full 2 hour arm workout and then decided to go for another run before showering again and changing into a pair of shorts and a sweater. She was sitting down reading and relaxing a little bit when Nat called.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“You wanna come over here tonight? I think everybody’s just planning on staying in.”

Shauna paused. Like… Jackie wanted her to come over? Or like Nat didn’t want her to feel left out? “So who exactly is extending the invite?”

Nat laughed, “If I say just me would I get rejected?”

Shauna laughed back, “No, I’m obviously coming over. If you want me there I’m there. I’m just trying to get a read here.”

Shauna heard Nat sigh and held her breath, “They told me they were staying in so I didn’t have to go back out to the bar and I told them it was okay because we had plans anyway and she said to just invite you. So here I am… inviting you.”

“I’ll be there in ten.” Shauna took a deep breath and looked at herself in the mirror. She threw her hair up in a ponytail and put a bottle of rum in her backpack before starting the walk over to Nat’s place. When she got there she took a deep breath at the door. She knocked and Lottie opened the door with a smile. She gave Shauna a hug and took her bottle from her at the door. Shauna glanced around the room. Tai was glaring at her 100% and Van was grinning at Jackie, who was staring. She watched Jackie’s eyes move down her body, lingering on her thighs in a way that felt a little exposing. She licked her lips and then made eye contact with Shauna before glancing away. Shauna felt her cheeks get hot and she took the opportunity to fully take her in. She looked beautiful. She had a big t-shirt on and a pair of sweats. Her hair was messy in the best possible way and her cheeks were a little red. Her lips were pulled into a smile due to whatever conversation she was having with Van, and Shauna was so, so grateful for it. She loved her. She loved her so fucking much.

Shauna blinked for the first time since she walked through the door and she snapped herself out of it. When she walked into the kitchen, she found Nat at the counter pouring drinks. “Is one of those for me?” Shauna asked. Nat jumped in surprise and started laughing with a hand on her chest.

“Jesus Christ, Shauna.” Shauna laughed and walked over, resting her head on Nat’s shoulder as she finished off the last drink. “Yes. This and a shot before we head back out there.” Nat handed Shauna a rum and coke and grabbed two shot glasses from the cupboard. Shauna slammed her drink and set down the empty glass, refilling it herself as Nat poured their shots. They raised them and knocked them back, chasing them with their mixed drinks.

“How has this been? Being around them?” Shauna asked.

Nat shrugged and finished her own drink, refilling it as she responded, “It’s fine. I mean we’re not best friends, you know. Van’s cool. Tai is cool some of the time and less cool at others. Jackie has actually probably been the nicest of the group since they’ve gotten here, which is a little freaky actually.” Shauna smiled. Even though her and Jackie weren’t exactly on speaking terms, she really wanted the two of them to get along. They were the two most important people in her life.

“That’s actually really cool of her.” Nat shrugged.

“My theory is that she’s just grateful I’m taking care of you. I still don’t think she likes me.”

Shauna thought about it as she took another drink. She clearly still cared about Shauna to some degree. Maybe she was just being nice because of that, but maybe she realized that if two people she cared about loved Nat then maybe she was worth loving. “Well either way. I think it’s nice that you’re able to hang with them. I know you weren’t exactly close with them in high school.” Nat nodded.

“Ready?” Shauna topped off her drink and nodded, walking out of the kitchen and back into the living room. Van suggested a game of never have I ever, which at this point was pretty standard. Jackie and Shauna sat across the circle from each other and Shauna

constantly felt her eyes on her. She was trying not to be too pervy, but it felt like Jackie was kind of upset that she wasn't looking. Shauna thought back to last night and the way Jackie had wanted her to look at her. Jackie liked it. She liked being watched and she liked being looked at, and Shauna fucking liked doing it. She looked up and found Jackie's eyes on her. It was like lightning through her nerves. Jackie looked away quickly and Shauna took a deep breath, trying her best to pay attention on the game they were playing.

Tai went first, "Never have I ever gone more than two days without showering." Shauna took a drink, expecting Tai's judgement until she realized everybody else had taken a drink too.

Jackie went next, "Never have I ever pretended to be sick to get out of work." They were starting out very easy it seemed. Shauna took a drink, thinking back to her first babysitting job. She fucking hated it, but it was good money and she needed it for gas when she turned 16. One day, she just couldn't bring herself to go so she faked a cough and spent the day watching movies on the couch with Jackie. She had all but forgotten that moment, and she kind of hated herself for it.

Lottie went next, "Never have I ever kissed a boy." She wiggled her eyebrows at Nat, who obviously had and Nat laughed before taking a drink. Shauna looked down as she took a drink, thinking about Jeff and all of the times she had tasted Jackie's lipstick on his lips. She was so fucking stupid. She knew Jackie was looking at her, but she couldn't look up at her and see it. She just kept looking down.

Her head snapped up at Nat's words, "Never have I ever made out in a bar." Shauna glanced up to look at Jackie and saw her take a drink. She locked eyes with her and felt her stomach turn. She thought about Jackie pressed against that girl last night. She thought about her new girlfriend. How many times had they made out in a bar? How many times had Jackie kissed her? She was so fucking jealous. She was burning with jealousy in a way that didn't allow her to hear whatever conversations were going on around her. Jackie looked over to Tai and it snapped her out of it.

She looked up and Nat nodded at her. It was her turn. Fuck. She had to think of a question, but all she could think about was Jackie at this fucking bar with somebody else. "Never have I ever ordered somebody else a drink at a bar." Shauna again, looked up to see Jackie drink. Her jealousy and anger turned to sadness. It was over. It was clear she had moved on. Shauna had to chill the fuck out. She had to calm the fuck down.

Van started talking and Shauna realized that she was fucked up already. She was slurring her words and giggling between them. When did she get this drunk? She must have started early. "Hmmmm. I don't know. Never have I ever… brought a bartender home after her shift." She laughed and looked at Lottie, whose expression went blank almost immediately. Shauna looked back and saw Jackie take a drink. Shauna swallowed hard. She had taken her home. They had sex. Fuck. FUCK. Shauna felt her heart break and watched as Jackie avoided her gaze. It felt like confirmation. Shauna looked over at Nat, who nodded at her reassuringly and set her hand on her leg. Shauna took a deep breath and tried to ignore the cold sweat she was breaking out in. Lottie suggested playing cards instead, and everybody around her moved to make it happen. Shauna was just stuck on the thought of somebody else making her cum. She was stuck on her dating and bringing someone home from the bar. Jackie didn't want her. Maybe she wanted to be friendly, maybe she wanted Shauna's

attention, but she didn't want her. It wasn't going to be that. Shauna decided to shift her focus to Lottie and Nat for the time being and tried to dive headfirst into their game of King's Cup.

"You alright?" Nat asked it quietly when nobody else would notice. Lottie came back from the bathroom with new drinks for her and Nat, which Shauna was grateful for. She took a long sip and nodded in response to Nat.

"Yeah. I mean… I knew, right?" Nat nodded and went back to the card game.

Shauna had mostly calmed down when she heard Jackie's voice saying her name. Her head snapped around so fast that it kind of hurt. "Shauna… um, what are you majoring in again?" She didn't know her major? Actually?

Shauna looked down at her lap as she answered, "English Lit."

"Oh yeah, I knew that… obviously," Jackie answered. Shauna gave her a small smile and the room went quiet.

"She's doing really well, actually," Nat chimed in. "Her professors love her and her writings are really good." Shauna looked over at Nat and smiled, grateful both for the compliment and the break in the silence.

"Yeah, I bet. Why wouldn't they?" When Jackie said it Shauna glanced up, seeing a sincere smile on her face. Her eyes moved nervously to Shauna's lips and then back up to her eyes. Shauna felt herself blush and she started to feel a little better about it all. One compliment and she was back.

"Thank you, Jax." Jackie nodded and Tai quickly turned everybody's attention back to their game, making a new rule that Van had to stop drinking, which seemed to be a group favorite.

An hour later, Jackie declared everybody needed chips and salsa to rally from their lull of energy after the card game. Shauna glanced at Lottie to see if she should follow, knowing that Lottie would know what she was thinking. Lot nodded her head slightly toward the kitchen, giving Shauna the okay to go talk to her. She ignored the feeling of Tai's glare on her back as she walked in. Jackie was tucked behind the fridge, illuminated by the light inside of it. Shauna paused for a second, just watching her eyes scan the fridge contents. She was so fucking beautiful.

"We gotta stop meeting like this…" Shauna joked to ease the tension she was expecting. Jackie looked up at her and laughed. She felt her heart flutter at it and she smiled.

They sat in a comfortable silence for a second before Jackie spoke up, "Hey look… I'm sorry about last night. I don't… I don't know. It felt weird tonight, I guess." Shauna thought about Jackie's hands on that girl's thighs and her stomach. She thought about the look in Jackie's eyes as she made Shauna watch it… as she *wanted* her to watch it. Fuck. Her legs and her chest in that fucking dress. Shauna took a deep breath and shook her head.

"You don't need to apologize. You didn't do anything wrong. I can't expect you to stand in a corner by yourself all night, as much as I'd probably prefer it." Shauna was probably powered by the alcohol in her system, but she meant it. Jackie seemed surprised that she had said it, raising her eyebrows at the boldness of the statement. Shauna sighed and continued,

explaining herself, “I’m never going to like it, Jackie. Seeing it…” Shauna took a deep breath, trying to stop herself from going back to last night. “I— I ruined that, I get it. It didn’t go away, though. I shouldn’t have thrown a fit about it, but I just need you to know why. I just wanted to clear the air.”

Shauna held her eye contact, trying to show her how much she meant it. Jackie’s mouth hung open slightly and she stuttered over her next words. “Okay… well… I appreciate that, actually.” Shauna sighed. She needed more from her. She needed to know more.

“I just—” Shauna looked down and collected her thoughts, “Are you happy?” Jackie looked at her in silence for a minute.

“Yeah. I mean… generally yeah. I think so.” Shauna shook her head. She was trying not to get frustrated but it was so hard to ask what she wanted to ask. She wanted to know if she was in love. She wanted to know if she loved her more than she ever had Shauna.

“No, Jax. I mean—” Her words failed her and she looked down, folding entirely under Jackie’s gaze. ‘Sorry. It’s hard to talk like this, but I’m trying.’ She looked back up, trying to stop herself from tearing up. “Lottie mentioned someone. The bartender I’m assuming…” Shauna looked at her, begging for a response, begging for details. She needed to hear it from her. Jackie’s eyebrows furrowed. It looked like she was in pain.

“That… um. That’s nothing, really. We’re more friends than anything else.” Shauna looked down again. It felt like she was lying. Obviously they weren’t just friends. She was ready to just turn around and walk back out. She didn’t really deserve to be the person Jackie opened up to, anyway. ‘We just… “Shauna looked back up and felt her heart break again at her expression. Of course there was a ‘but’.” We just kiss, really.’ Shauna felt like she had been slapped in the face. She felt her muscles tense at the word and the visual of Jackie’s lips on somebody else. “When we’re drunk. It’s nothing more. Never will be.” Shauna felt how bad that hurt deep in her chest. She knew she did it to herself, and she had assumed they were together, but Jesus Christ. This was just a lot. Maybe she didn’t want details. Maybe she couldn’t handle them.

Her words came out quieter than she intended them, “I know I asked, and thank you for being honest, but please… I don’t want to know.” Shauna felt like she could cry. Jackie nodded and looked down at Shauna’s lips. Shauna tried to shake it. She tried to ignore the look, ignore the way Jackie’s bright eyes darkened at the sight of them. She started to turn away, but she just couldn’t leave yet. She couldn’t be done like this.

She exhaled quickly and turned back to Jackie, closing the distance between them with one quick step and grabbing her face. She pulled Jackie’s chin to meet her and kissed her deeply, passionately. She wanted her, and she wanted Jackie to know that she wanted her. She wanted her to feel it. Jackie kissed her back the same way, and Shauna felt her eyes start to water. She knew she had to break it off if she wanted to keep any kind of composure, and as she pulled away she whispered, “I just had to, you know? One more time.” Shauna hesitantly let go of Jackie’s chin and turned to walk back out, taking a deep breath as she joined the rest of the group.

She met Nat’s eyes first and nodded at her, reassuring her that it was okay. She was okay. She said what she needed to and she did what she needed to. It was okay.

Shauna spent the rest of the night trying not to look at Jackie. She needed to just let that be. She needed to give that whole situation space. A half hour later Shauna started to say her goodbyes.

"I think I'm gonna head home, okay?" Lottie nodded at her and Nat shook her head.

"I'm gonna go with you," Nat said. She looked at Lottie and leaned into her, "You guys have fun on your last night, okay? I'll crash at Shauna's." Shauna left them to say goodbye and she approached Jackie, Van, and Tai on the couch.

"I'm gonna head out. It was really good to see you guys, though." Van stood up and wrapped her in a hug. Shauna could smell the liquor on her and laughed. Van's weight shifted to Shauna's arms and she realized just how drunk she was. Tai laughed and grabbed her by her hip, pulling her down onto her lap. Shauna smiled at Jackie, who was watching her over Van's shoulder.

"Your bottle's still in the kitchen, I think." Jackie stood up and they walked together to grab it, even though Shauna had every intention of leaving it behind. They walked into the kitchen and Jackie picked up her bottle off the counter, holding it for a second. She paused and looked down at her feet. 'Thank you… for being so honest.' Shauna nodded, feeling the weight of the two of them being alone together again. She looked like there was more she wanted to say, but she just handed the bottle over and cleared her throat, "Bye, Shipman."

Shauna smiled, "Bye, Jax." Nat walked in the kitchen at that moment.

"It was good to see you again, Jackie. I'm gonna head out with Shauna but I'm sure I'll see you soon." Jackie reached around Shauna and pulled Nat into a hug. Nat gave Shauna a confused look over her shoulder and Shauna tried not to laugh at her shock.

As they shut the door, Shauna let out the breath she had been holding. Nat laughed at her, "That was good, right?"

"Well… I guess we'll see how much Lottie wants to kill me tomorrow." Shauna walked down the stairs and Nat trailed her.

"What'd you do?" Nat asked it cautiously, like she wasn't really sure if she wanted to know.

"Um… I kissed her."

"Fuck, Shauna." Nat caught up to her on the street and they walked together to her dorm room.

"It was good I think. We talked a little. I don't know. I don't feel bad about it. It was like a closure thing. She didn't seem upset."

"She kissed you back?" Shauna tried to hide her smile so she didn't seem too giddy.

"Yeah. She kissed me back." Nat sighed and they took the elevator up to the third floor.

"It's a closure thing… Like, you're done?"

"I don't think I'm ever gonna be done, but she is I think." Shauna refused to look at her and just looked forward as she talked. "I'm okay. I know what I want, and maybe dating her

isn’t gonna happen, maybe it is just not right now. I feel kind of grounded in a way.”

“Well, yeah. You talked to her. You don’t have anything to let your mind spiral with.” She was probably right, but regardless. She wanted Jackie in her life. She wanted to be honest with her. “What’s your plan?”

“I don’t have one. I’ve got nothing to lose at this point. I’m gonna be honest and try to control my temper. When she wants to talk we’ll talk.” Shauna keyed into her room and let them both in.

“You think she’ll want to talk?” Nat asked, plopping down on Shauna’s bed.

“Yeah. I think she’ll want to.” Her and Nat didn’t say much more, just passing out without even bothering to change.

Chapter 23

Jackie was gone, and Shauna was trying not to think about it. The feeling of her lips haunted every aspect of her life, though. She had fucking *missed* it. She knew Jackie wanted her. Nobody kisses somebody they don't like the way she did. Sure, Shauna had started it, but she had also been the one to end it. Jackie seemed to have no problem reciprocating, deepening, and furthering their kiss when she had the opportunity, which wasn't exactly great for Shauna's attempt at a normal life without her. She spent the first week after break writing. She was reinvigorated and reenergized. Jackie was her muse. Really, she always had been. Shauna might not have known how to properly channel it all, but Jackie had always been the person she journaled about. She had always been Shauna's purpose. Shauna wrote four complete stories in that one week, one of which was entirely dedicated to the feeling of Jackie's body and the tragedy of having something one second and its disappearance the next. These stories weren't for class or for other people to consume. They were for Shauna. They allowed her to keep pieces of Jackie and her experience, personality and really just her essence while she was away.

Once she had gotten it all out of her system, she started to spend more time at Lottie's. To her disappointment, Jackie hadn't slept on her day bed. Lottie had moved it into her and Nat's bedroom, claiming that it was Shauna's, and if she ever ended up needing to stay they were gonna have a place for her. It was kind, and she couldn't really complain, but Jackie's shirt didn't smell like her anymore. It lived permanently in Shauna's bed, still offering a certain sense of comfort, but it just didn't feel the same. She was hoping that the daybed would be some kind of replacement. Shauna was sitting on her day bed reading when the phone rang. It was Jackie. It had been Jackie the other three times that week too. Shauna looked at the phone and then over at Nat, who was mid eye roll. Lottie sprung up from the couch and answered, walking into another room for some kind of privacy.

"Does she always call this much?" Shauna asked. Nat laid down on the couch, turning on her side to look at Shauna.

"Since break? Yeah. Like every other day."

"But before then?" Nat shook her head. Why was she calling? What was she saying? What was she asking? Was there a possibility that she had spent time with Lottie and realized that she missed her and wanted to talk all the time now? Yes. Was there also a possibility that Lottie was in there getting interrogated about what Shauna had been up to since their kiss? Also yes. Who was to say which was more likely? "Do you know what they talk about?"

Nat sighed, "Lottie has her own friendships. I don't ask her for specific details. You know that." Shauna just wanted to know. She wanted to know what they talked about *so* badly.

She took a deep breath, looking back at her book and trying to make sense of the words, "Yeah I know." The conversation ended there and they sat in silence until Lottie walked back in. Shauna looked up at her expectantly, but Lot wouldn't look at her. She looked at Nat and Shauna could tell they were doing that whole talking but not talking thing. She sat up

straighter, knowing Lot was about to give her something. She didn't want to ask for it, but the silence was starting to eat her alive.

Lottie turned to her and spoke slowly, "So… she asked for your phone number." Shauna froze. She what?

"What did she say?" Nat sighed and watched her try her best not to freak out.

"She just said she might call. She was considering a conversation. Nothing was really that concrete." Shauna nodded slowly. She wanted to talk. She obviously had something to say, or she felt some type of way. Lottie sat down, holding Nat's head on her lap as she did so. "I told her she could have it but that I had to tell you. I didn't think you getting a random call one night would be good for anybody."

"Yeah, good idea," Nat said.

"So she has it? And she wants to call?" Lottie nodded.

"How do you feel about that?" Elated. Excited. Whatever other adjectives would fit. She couldn't even really put words to it. She just now had this desperate need to know what Jackie wanted to say. She needed to know.

"I just wanna know what she wants to say." Shauna stared at the phone. "You think she's gonna call tonight?"

"I don't know. She didn't seem exactly settled on the idea. She's probably gonna think about it for a while." Shauna nodded.

Her head snapped back around when she heard Nat groan, "No more. We're done with Jackie tonight. Let's go." She leapt up from the couch and grabbed Lottie with one hand and Shauna with the other.

"What? Where are we going?" Shauna asked as she was dragged out the door.

"We're gonna do something fun." Nat refused to give them any more information until they were walking through the doors to a bowling alley.

Shauna laughed, "We're gonna seriously go bowling right now? It's like 11pm."

"We're athletes, we haven't been competitive in months, and you need a fucking distraction. So I'm gonna get us some beers and we're gonna bowl."

Shauna laughed and looked at Lottie. This is how Nat was disguising that she had been wanting to go bowling for a while now. "Hey, I'm rolling with it," Lottie said. Nat left for the bar and Lottie and Shauna headed to go get shoes.

"You know she's been wanting to do this for weeks, right?" Shauna asked and Lottie looked at her and laughed.

"Oh for sure, but I don't care. I'm down."

They got their shoes and turned their lane on when Shauna just had to say it. "I'm sorry…" Lottie looked up at her and Shauna continued, "I feel like you're in the middle of this. You shouldn't be." Lottie shook her head.

“I love you both. You both care so much about each other. It’s not a problem for me to be your friend. Sometimes that means I’m in the middle. I’m okay with that.” Shauna smiled. She didn’t deserve Lottie. She was way too understanding for Shauna’s level of crazy.

“Still. I know it sucks, trying to figure out what you should and shouldn’t say. I feel bad asking.”

Lottie smiled and looked at her like she could see her soul. “I love you, Shauna. I really do.” Shauna smiled, surprised by the sincerity of it.

“Oh… thank you. I love you too, Lot.” Shauna was kind of reeling when Nat got back, but the beer helped. Really it had just been a weird night.

Bowling was more fun than she had expected. Nat was surprisingly really fucking good at it to Lottie’s obvious frustration. Her 70 wasn’t really keeping up with Nat’s 206. Shauna was dead middle, not good by any means but also not throwing at gutter balls. She bowled a 130, which she was pretty proud of. She hadn’t been bowling in years, and she still managed to beat Lot.

“When the FUCK did you get good at bowling?” Lottie asked. She sounded exasperated. She fucking hated losing.

Nat laughed at her, “I used to hook up with this guy who worked at a bowling alley. Got free bowls and free beer whenever he was on shift.”

Lottie laughed and rolled her eyes, “That makes it so much better actually that you just kicked my ass. You were trained… by some dude trying to get in your pants.” Shauna couldn’t help but laugh. It wasn’t often that Lottie let this side shine through. She was competitive as fuck though, and it was funny.

“Sounds like he actually did get in her pants,” Shauna joked. Nat sent her a glare and Lottie laughed.

“Okay, Jackie. Easy on the slut shaming,” Nat said with a grin. Shauna laughed and looked at Lottie, who had come to the same realization. Nat was the first one to bring her up since her own ban. Nat realized it at the same time and covered her face with her hands.

Shauna turned to Lottie, “So Lot, do you think that maybe… I don’t know, Nat misses Jackie a little bit? I mean, she was the first to bring her up…”

Lottie grinned, “You know… I think so. I think maybe she’s even starting to like her.”

Nat laughed and shook her head, “Just cause I mentioned her doesn’t mean that you two just get to start moping about it all again.”

“Hmm… I don’t know. What do you think, Shipman?” The nickname made Shauna smile. It wasn’t the same coming from Lottie, but it was still comfortable.

Nat spoke up before she could, “How about this? I buy another game and we all spend another hour in Jackie-less bliss. Deal?”

Shauna laughed. This was fun. This was really fucking fun. “Works for me.”

Lottie grinned, “Same here.”

Nat hugged Lottie from behind, which looked a little awkward given the height difference, and said something Shauna never wanted to fucking hear again, “Maybe when I get back I can you know… teach you a thing or two.” It was gross, and Lottie recoiled just as much as Shauna did. Nat laughed as Lottie pretended to gag and pushed her away.

“Alright, alright. Go turn the lane back on please.” Nat walked back up to the front and Shauna looked at Lottie.

“You guys look happy. Like… disgustingly happy, but happy.”

“We are.” Lottie looked over at Nat and smiled softly, “I kind of have you to thank, you know?”

Shauna laughed. Yeah, thank god she fucked Jeff and blew up her life because it inspired Nat to do the exact opposite. “Glad I could be of service,” Lottie laughed as she gave a pathetic salute.

“It was coming either way, you know. Sure, the Jeff thing didn’t help… but you were both so different then. I don’t know…” Lottie looked over at Nat and smiled, “You both get to become yourselves now, and yeah it sucks that it blew up… but would Nat have ever really known you otherwise? Would she have…” Lottie cleared her throat, “Made it? I probably wouldn’t have her or Jackie in my life. I don’t know. It doesn’t have to be all bad.” Shauna looked at her for a second. She had a point. The path they were going down wasn’t exactly healthy regardless of all of Shauna’s fucked up shit. Who knows how much worse this could’ve been three, four years down the line.

“I’m not gonna say I’m glad I did it… but I am *really* glad that I have you guys now.” Lottie smiled and as Nat walked back, they silently agreed to drop it. Shauna really loved talking to Lottie. It was always just… grounding. She had a special talent for bringing people back down to Earth.

Their night was so much fun that she almost forgot Jackie had wanted to talk to her. Almost. She got back to her dorm room and practically ran to the phone. No missed calls, no messages. Part of her wanted to sit by that phone until it rang, as long as it took. She did that first night. She slept in her desk chair, unwilling to miss a beat if she did decide to call, but the next morning she knew she had to go to class. She couldn’t put her life on hold for Jackie, as much as she might’ve wanted to. Weeks went by without a call. The first few, she was good about still going through her routine. She hung out at Nat’s, she hung out at the bar, she went to class and studied at the library. She wasn’t glued to the phone, but as time went on… she convinced herself it had to be coming any day now. There were only a few weeks left in the semester, and Jackie wouldn’t have asked if she hadn’t planned on calling before summer.

On week four, Nat stormed into her room. “This Jackie shit pisses me off, you know.”

Shauna laughed, “You’ve made that clear, yeah.” Nat laid back on her bed and stared at the ceiling.

“Are you coming over tonight?” Shauna was confused.

“Is something happening tonight?”

Nat huffed, “Do we have to throw a party to get you to hang out with us?”

Shauna laughed. She was being ridiculous. “We’re hanging out right now.”

Nat sat up and looked at her and then the phone. “Just fucking bring it. Be pathetic with liquor and pizza, okay?” And unplug the phone? The odds of her calling at that exact moment were slim but not zero, and she had no idea what happened if she did.

She shook her head, “It’s fine. Voicemail will be there tomorrow, yeah?”

Nat smiled. “Thank fuck.”

Shauna tried to spend the night having fun and relaxing, but all she could wonder was if the phone was ringing. Missing her call actually seemed like the worst thing in the world, and no amount of rum seemed to distract from that. At the end of the night, she insisted on walking home. Nat didn’t love the plan, but Lottie backed her. It wasn’t really that far and she had done it like a hundred times at this point. Finally she caved and Shauna ran to her phone. No missed calls, no messages. She sighed, collapsing into bed. If she had Jackie’s number she would’ve just fucking called her by now. This waiting game was fucked. She tried to sleep, but just couldn’t do it. She wanted to know what she wanted to say. It had been a fucking month. What was she so scared of? Shauna reached into her desk drawer and pulled out her over the counter melatonin pills. She had bought them during her last insomnia spurt and promised herself she’d only use them when she really needed to. They were fucking expensive, so she didn’t want to waste them. With that being said, it was clear that now was the time. She fell asleep slower than she had anticipated, but finally she drifted off, and finally the thought of that phone call was completely out of her mind.

Chapter 24

It was finals week, and Jackie still hadn't fucking called. Was this just another punishment? Was she trying to punish her? If so, it was working. It felt like fucking torture that Jackie had her number and Shauna didn't have hers. Every time Jackie called Lottie, Shauna truly considered just snatching the phone away and demanding answers, but she knew that wasn't the best way to get Jackie back in her life. Shauna gave up on it, deciding that she probably changed her mind, or called Lottie when she was drunk and didn't mean it. Maybe things had gotten more serious with this bartender and she decided Shauna wasn't worth questioning anymore. Regardless of what it was, Shauna had reached acceptance. Jackie wasn't going to call.

She finished her only final on Tuesday, and at that point in the semester was at least a week ahead on her final papers in every class. Her time spent at her desk waiting for a call had put her in a pretty good position academically. The bright side of the whole situation was that she had Tuesday night through Friday morning to be drunk and high off her ass with Nat. Lottie had all those important sciencey finals, which she didn't seem too stressed about but still had to put effort into, meaning she wasn't gonna be able to join them. Nat was a little bummed, but on Tuesday she walked into Shauna's dorm room (using the spare key that she had taken upon herself to get made) and crashed on her bed.

"We gotta do something tonight. I'm so fucking bored and my ADHD is gonna be the reason Lottie murders me and fails out of Brown."

Shauna laughed, setting her pen down. "Okay… what do you wanna do?"

Nat sat up, "Well…" Oh god. Shauna already knew it wasn't going to be something she wanted to do, 'It's pride night at the Alibi.' Shauna threw her head back and groaned. She did not want to go back to that club. "Oh come on! It'll be fun."

Shauna glared at her. The last time she was there she watched Jackie feel up another girl right in front of her face. "I don't know."

Nat sighed, "She made it very clear to you that she's having fun. You don't want to at least test the waters? You're single!" The word single shot through Shauna's chest. She didn't want to be single. She wanted to be Jackie's. Nat wasn't exactly wrong though.

"And do what? Get drunk and feel somebody up?"

"Yes! That's what college kids do!" Nat said it, throwing her hands in the air for emphasis.

"For what?" Nat rolled her eyes and Shauna continued, "I mean what am I gonna do? Fuck them? Date them? We both know that would be a fucking disaster."

"Why not? You could do all of those things, you could do none of those things. I don't understand why you're so scared to even consider it."

Shauna looked down at her journal and the entry she had just written. Apparently she had been wondering the same thing recently.

She could want me. She could process and we could talk this summer. What if she still wants this? What if she just needed time and space? She can't be done, right? And what if we talk and when we talk I tell her I had kissed someone or gotten close with someone? If it feels like I'm fucking Jeff again anytime I think about it… it has to be worse for her. She would hate it. She would hate me for it. I just fucking can't.

"What if she just wants to talk in person? What if there's something still there and I ruin it by fucking some random person I met at a bar?"

Nat sighed, "Then you tell her the same way she hasn't fucking hesitated to tell you. She can't be mad when she's doing the same thing."

"She didn't cheat on me with my boyfriend."

The eye roll that Nat responded with was dramatic enough to make Shauna laugh. "That's what we're calling it? You're telling me that you cheated on Jackie with Jeff? Seriously?"

Shauna shrugged. That's what it had felt like. "I mean… I pretty much did."

Nat screamed in frustration. "No you didn't! She was the one with a boyfriend. She was the one that made the decision to get with you while she was in a relationship. You had your own fuck up. Please don't start because I fucking know, but *she's* the cheater! You guys weren't ever dating because she didn't have the balls to dump Jeff."

No. It was essentially cheating. As far as Shauna was concerned, it was cheating in two different ways. She shook her head, "She didn't want Jeff. She told me that. She said she was pretending to love him the way she loved me. Really, I pretty much cheated twice. I slept with her boyfriend when they were together… cheating number one, and then I slept with him when Jackie and I were together… cheating number two."

"So you're just gonna be celibate then? Worse than celibate, actually." Shauna shrugged and Nat laughed, "Girl. We both know you need to chill the fuck out. We both know getting laid or even just having a slightly flirty conversation at a bar would do wonders for that fucked up, sad, lonely brain in your head. Please? Will you please just come with me?"

"I plan on being celibate only until we talk about shit. Lottie's planning that get together when we get back, I'll talk to her then. I'm not gonna do anything to hurt her. I can live another week without sex."

Nat raised her eyebrows, "You know that insinuates you're planning on having sex in a week, right?"

Shauna rolled her eyes, "You know what I mean."

"For the love of God Shauna, please don't fuck her or kiss her or do any more stupid shit to keep you in this limbo without having a conversation."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. We both know if the opportunity arose there is absolutely no situation where I turn her down, so this conversation is pointless."

Nat collapsed back into her bed. "You're going to the club tonight, I don't care."

“Promise not to pimp me out again?” Shauna joked.

“Not for at least an hour, but if you’re being antisocial that’s on you.” Shauna laughed and Nat sat up grinning. Shauna got dressed in a loose fitting, short sleeve button up and a pair of jeans. She left her hair natural, savoring the rare effortless good hair day she was having, and applied a little less makeup than she usually would have. She kind of liked the more masculine look. Her hard work at the gym had paid off, and her arms were strong and toned. She looked good. She felt more confident than she probably ever had.

When she walked into Nat’s apartment, Lottie was sprawled out on the living room floor and the shower was running. “She running a little behind schedule?” Shauna asked, laughing and walking over to sit on the couch, pulling a couple beers out of her bag to pregame with.

“Always,” it came out as a mumble around the pen in her mouth.

“How’s the studying going?” Lottie looked up at her and she looked exhausted.

“Well, I’m onto exam 3 now. Really the concepts aren’t that hard, but it’s like… I’m gonna hate myself if I just decide I don’t need to study and then fail, you know?”

Shauna nodded slowly, “Well, yeah. Just… maybe get some sleep too. Are you doing okay?”

Lottie looked off to the side like she didn’t want to meet Shauna’s eyes. “I’m okay. Just stressed.” Shauna nodded slowly. She wasn’t sure if she was supposed to push or not.

“I just— you look like you haven’t slept and I know it’s finals week but…” Shauna didn’t want anything to come off as an accusation, she just felt bad that Lottie had been there for her all this time and she felt like she couldn’t open up. She rerouted, “I’ll let you study. I don’t wanna fuck with your process, but I’m always here.”

Lottie smiled and reached out to pat Shauna’s thigh. “Thank you. I’m okay, though.” Shauna nodded and Nat walked out of her bedroom, dressed and ready.

“Wow. That was fast, actually. I thought we’d be at least another hour.” Nat scoffed and walked over to Lot, kissing the top of her head and wrapping her arms around her shoulders. Shauna watched Lottie relax into the touch. Her face didn’t seem so pale anymore, and the light was back in her eyes. They really were the best thing for each other.

“Alright babe, I’m off to pimp Shauna out to any pretty blonde we find at the bar.” Lottie laughed and shook her head.

“No she’s not. Don’t listen to her.” Shauna panicked a little that Lottie would relay that to Jackie, even though she knew she wouldn’t. Nat started laughing and walked toward Shauna, wrapping an arm around her shoulder.

“Tell her she needs to get laid,” Nat said it and Lottie closed her eyes, trying not to laugh or smile.

“I am an impartial party. I couldn’t imagine the wrath of Jackie Taylor if I told you to go get laid.” Nat laughed again and then booed her. Shauna shook her head. She didn’t know if it excited her that Jackie would be jealous, or if her pre-existing guilt was just doubled. Realistically, it was probably both.

“Nobody’s getting laid. We’re having fun. That was the deal,” Shauna glared at Nat who backed off and started grinning.

They said their goodbyes to Lottie and left her to her exams, making their way around the corner to the club. They walked in and it was PACKED. There were no seats at the bar top, forcing Shauna and Nat to the dance floor. It was uncomfortable. It was very uncomfortable. People were touching her, bumping into her, yelling at the top of their lungs to make introductions to people they had never met. It was overstimulating. Nat was having fun, jumping and dancing to the music. Apparently, she had brought a bottle of tequila into the shower to speed up the pregame. She was on a much different level. She started to dance with this very flamboyant gay guy who seemed to match her energy. It was kind of cute, actually. Shauna excused herself to the bar. She needed a couple shots if she was gonna last in this place. She found a lone empty barstool and sat down, waiting patiently for the bartender to realize she had gotten there.

The girl next to her glanced over subtly, but Shauna caught it. She took a deep breath, waiting for the very awkward conversation that she knew was probably coming. Instead, she waved the bartender over by name and let him know Shauna wanted a drink.

She smiled at her, and Shauna finally got a good look. She had long dark hair past her shoulders, with tan skin and brown eyes. She looked kind. Shauna ordered three shots, making sure to get one for the girl as a thank you.

Shauna turned to face her. “Thank you for that. I might’ve been waiting all night otherwise.”

“Yeah it’s no problem.” Shauna offered her a shot and they took the first one together and then Shauna downed the second alone. The girl looked her up and down, and Shauna could feel herself blush. “I’m Ava.”

Shauna smiled at her, “Shauna.” She nodded and they sat in a tension filled silence for a while. “You come here a lot?”

She smiled and half nodded, “When I’m not in season. It’s been a while, but we just lost the tournament last week so I’m trying to enjoy it.” Shauna nodded.

“You’re an athlete? At Brown?”

Ava nodded, “Women’s lacrosse. You?”

“Oh no. I don’t play any sports here.”

She raised her eyebrows and looked at Shauna’s arms. It was kind of flattering, “Really?”

Shauna laughed, “Yeah. I played soccer in high school, but nothing since then.”

“Interesting,” Ava grinned and took a sip of her drink.

Shauna ordered another beer and took a sip, looking at this Ava girl. It was nice to be looked at. It was nice to have somebody looking at her arms and smiling at her. She just… wasn’t fucking Jackie. It was all Shauna could think about, and it made her sick to know how easy it had been for her. She had picked somebody up at a bar SO fast. Shauna looked down at the bar. “What’s your major?”

"Psychology. What about you?" Shauna's head shot back up. She probably knew Lottie.

"English Lit. Wait, do you know Charlotte Matthews?" Shauna felt kind of disgusted saying her full name. It felt so proper.

"Yeah, I do. We've got a class together I think. How do you know her?"

Shauna suddenly felt ten times more comfortable in this conversation. She turned to face Ava and watched her smile as she did it. "We played soccer together! In high school." Shauna wasn't exactly sure how much Lottie felt comfortable sharing about her dating preferences so she just left it at that.

"Wow really? You guys came here together?"

"No, no. I didn't even know she was enrolled until the summer. But since then we've gotten really close. I love Lottie."

"Are you guys… together?" Shauna laughed and Ava continued, "I just know how you soccer girls can be."

"No, no. We're not like that." Ava nodded and laughed too.

"Sorry, didn't mean to assume or whatever."

"No it's okay. Soccer girls are absolutely like that, just not me and Lot. Out of our 11 starters, I think like 6 are out, and I'm skeptical of a few more."

Ava laughed, "You'll find out in ten years, I'm sure." Shauna laughed. She wondered if Jackie had called. Probably not.

"Yeah, that reunion's probably gonna be crazy." Ava smiled at her as Nat walked up to the bar out of breath. "Speaking of… one of the six." Nat narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

"One of six what?" Nat asked.

"Dykes on our team. This is Ava, she's on the women's lacrosse team and she has classes with Lottie." Nat's smile doubled in size and her eyes lit up at the mention of her. She figured Nat would know how much Lottie was comfortable with.

"Oh it's more than 6 for sure," Nat said.

"That's what I was just saying!" Shauna laughed. Nat ordered another beer and dragged her back out to the dancefloor. They said their goodbyes to their new friend and Shauna felt looser and more comfortable than she did before. Her and Nat danced a little and just tried to have fun. The music was fucking awful. Jackie would have loved it. Around 2, they decided to call it and head home. When they walked into Nat's apartment, Lottie was in the same spot. Shauna watched Nat's face fall. She walked over and pulled her into a hug.

"Come on, baby. Let's go to bed, yeah?" Nat shot Shauna an apologetic look and she shook her head. There was no need for her to feel guilty. She was taking care of her girl. That was way more important than sitting with Shauna for three minutes until she passed out on the day bed, which is exactly what she did.

Chapter 25

Break came soon after, and with that came Jackie. Lottie's last final was at 11 am, so they didn't get on the road until later. Shauna drove the three of them back, said hi to her mom and jumped in the shower. She needed to get to Lottie's ASAP. Lottie's is where Jackie was going to be, so the sooner she could get there the better. She put on the biggest tank top she had left, which at this point still didn't really cover her tits. It was white and honestly she looked good in it, it was just a little revealing. She threw on a pair of grey athletic shorts and a flannel too. She was about to just run out the door, but caught herself in the mirror. Would it be overkill to do her makeup just for a casual night of drinking? Fuck it. She put on some eye shadow and a little bit of eyeliner. She did a once over before grabbing her keys and running out the door.

She spent the three hours before Jackie got there drinking like she never had before. Her and Nat did shots while Lottie was in the shower, and then her and Lottie did some when she got out. She drank a couple beers, and by the time Jackie showed up she was fucking hammered. She walked in and Shauna's jaw dropped. It was like every time she saw her she remembered how fucking perfect she was. She couldn't help but stare at her lips and the way her hair perfectly framed her face. She was beautiful. She walked through the door and immediately her eyes found Shauna. She smiled and it was genuine. She didn't look like she was angry or over it. She didn't look like she didn't want to talk to her. Why didn't she call? Nat nudged her and Shauna looked over at her. "What are you gonna say?"

"I'm just gonna ask why she got my number and never called. I just don't get it. For a second I thought she was just trying to fuck with my head but now… I don't know. She's fucking confusing." Nat laughed and Shauna looked back over at her. They spent the night catching up and it was surprisingly fun. She had missed Jackie. She missed her smile and her laugh and just her presence. Lottie and Nat decided to take it upon themselves to make sure they only played games that didn't start any drama, at least at first, which was probably for the best. Shauna was ridiculously drunk at this point, and any twinge of jealousy probably would've caused her to make some bad decisions. She was running hot and she couldn't tell if it was due to the alcohol or the very bad, bad thoughts running through her head. Maybe she did need to get laid, fuck. She took her flannel off when she started to sweat, and from across the room she felt Jackie's eyes on her tits. She turned to look and Jackie didn't even look like she was trying to hide it. Shauna smiled and watched Van shoulder check her lightly, making eye contact with Shauna and laughing as she turned to presumably give her shit for staring. Shauna liked it. She pulled her tank top down just a little bit further and suggested a game of mafia. Really, she just wanted to force Jackie to look at her. She liked being looked at.

Jackie made eye contact and Shauna felt her lips twitch up in a little smirk. She couldn't help it, really. Jackie blinked at her and her cheeks got red. She looked Shauna up and down, her mouth parted slightly the further down she looked, and Shauna knew she had to talk to her. This was fucking killing her, actually. When they finished the first round, Shauna walked to the kitchen to get herself a drink.

She started to pour one for herself and as she saw the door open, started to make a vodka cran too. Jackie walked in and now that they were alone and a conversation had to be had… Shauna wasn't really sure how to approach it. She was hurt really when it came down to it. It was fucking awful to sit by the phone waiting for a call that never came. She didn't understand it, and she was kind of terrified to know why. Jackie pulled her out of her head, "Hey. I was kinda hoping we'd run into each other here." Shauna looked up, meeting Jackie's eyes. She couldn't help but smile. She was fucking beautiful.

Shauna decided she couldn't sit on it any longer, "So… Lottie told me she gave you my number."

Jackie smiled and looked away. "Oh…" Shauna handed the drink over and Jackie took a sip before she continued, "Yeah. She did." Jackie looked back up at her and despite her beautiful, striking eyes, Shauna was getting frustrated.

Obviously she wanted to know why. Obviously she was going to ask a follow up question. Why did Jackie need to hear her say it? "You didn't call." Jackie looked down at her feet and Shauna took a long drink. She wasn't gonna say anything. Shauna felt the anxiety of the silence bubbling in her stomach. Did she want to know? Probably not, but she needed to. One way or another. "Did you want to call?" Shauna watched Jackie look up at her. Her face fell when they made eye contact and Shauna could tell it hurt her. It hurt Shauna too to have to talk like this. It hurt Shauna too that they didn't talk, but at this point that was on Jackie.

She sighed before answering, "I didn't know what to say."

She didn't want to talk to her. It wasn't what she had hoped for. It wasn't what she had waited by that phone for. Shauna couldn't look her in the eyes. It sucked. It really sucked. She looked down at her feet before finishing the drink she had just made and settling on the door instead. Maybe she should just go back out there. She had to say something, though. "Yeah. I get that."

Shauna refilled her drink and started to gather herself to just walk back out. Jackie didn't want to talk to her anyway. Jackie must've sensed it, because she immediately pulled her back in, "I thought we could talk, you know?" Shauna's head snapped back up to try to get a read on what she meant. So now she wanted to talk? She was so fucking confusing. "For Lot and Nat, I mean." That made sense. It had nothing to do with Shauna, obviously. She had moved on. Why did she keep convincing herself otherwise?

Either way, she had a chance to see her again in a different setting, maybe sober, maybe one on one. She wasn't gonna pass on that. "Yeah. That's a good idea." Shauna took a deep breath, 'We could do lunch, maybe? Tomorrow?' Jackie nodded at her slowly. She seemed shocked, but whatever. Shauna was just being proactive. "Like 2ish? Does that work?" Jackie nodded, looking her up and down again. Shauna liked the way her eyes lingered on her tits. She seemed to be a fan of them.

Shauna spent the rest of the night trying to ignore the way Jackie was looking at her. She looked conflicted, and that kind of sucked. Shauna was anything but conflicted. She wanted her. She was always going to fucking want her. Jackie had that familiar dark look in her eyes, but maybe that was just because Shauna's tits were out. Maybe it had nothing to do with her at all, because she also seemed like she was avoiding her. She was pretty much

glued to Tai's hip, which was essentially the same as having an anti-Shauna guard dog with her at all times. Shauna could settle for the looks across the room, though. It was so much better than the lack of a phone call, or knowing her voice was a room away talking to Lot. Jackie's focus and attention trained on her was better than anything she could've asked for.

Towards the end of the night, Shauna found herself in a quiet corner of the room with Lottie. They watched Nat interact with the group. As much shit as she talked about hating them, she did seem to be having fun. Her and Van were in some kind of heated debate and Lottie laughed watching her get more and more animated with every sentence. "They're growing on her for sure. It's kind of cute."

Shauna smiled. "She never had much of an issue with Van did she? I feel like Van's hard to have beef with." Lottie shrugged in response and Shauna looked over to Jackie. Her and Tai had just left the kitchen with newly refreshed drinks and wide smiles.

"Did you talk to her yet?"

Shauna tore her eyes away from Jackie and looked over at Lottie, who was smiling knowingly. Shauna was so fucking see through when it came to Jackie. She couldn't hide her feelings about it if she tried. "I asked why she didn't call and she said she didn't know what to say."

Lottie nodded and looked over at her, "I really thought she'd call. I wouldn't have told you if I had known. I'm sorry."

Shauna shook her head, "That's not on you. I just don't get it." Shauna sighed and rubbed her temples. "Do you think she was trying to mess with me?" She knew Shauna was obsessive and she knew Shauna wanted to talk to her. It had been eating at her for weeks now. Was she trying to play with her as some kind of punishment?

Lottie's head snapped up and she looked at Shauna with concern. "No. I don't think she's trying to punish you." Jackie looked up at them and smiled. Shauna smiled back and nodded at her. "No. She wouldn't do that. Things are just complicated right now." Nat and Van came walking over to them giggling and pulled them to the middle of the room.

"We're playing truth or dare. Nat and I decided," Van declared. Tai groaned as Van pulled them in too. Jackie locked eyes with Shauna and sat down next to her. They were close. Too close for drunk Shauna to be able to focus on anything else. Nat looked at her from across the circle and raised her eyebrows, nudging Lottie to get her attention too. Shauna rolled her eyes and shifted a few inches away from Jackie. It didn't need to be a thing.

Nat went first, "Okay, Shipman. Truth or dare." Shauna felt everybody turn to her and panicked.

"Oh god. I'm terrified of what your dare would be. Truth, I guess."

Lottie laughed and Nat smirked. She was about to be brutal. "Okay. Fuck marry kill: Laura Lee, Mari, Travis Martinez." Shauna groaned and let her head fall in defeat. What an impossible fucking question.

"Kill Mari," Shauna said a little too fast.

Jackie laughed and threw her head back, "You would."

"I think most of us would," Nat said, dismissing it and encouraging Shauna to continue.

Shauna laughed, "Oh, god. Um… I guess I'd have to marry Laura Lee and fuck Travis." Shauna looked over at Jackie, clocking her eye roll before it even happened. She ignored it. It was Shauna's turn to ask somebody.

"Van?"

"Dare, baby. Obviously." Shauna thought about it, looking around the room for inspiration.

"I dare you to combine whatever is left out on the kitchen table in a drink and chug it." Van sprung up, running to the kitchen and disappearing to make her drink. Tai ran after to make sure she didn't cheat. Shauna looked over at Jackie and scooted closer to her, closing the distance she had created earlier discreetly enough to not draw Nat's attention. Jackie looked like she didn't notice, but as Van and Tai pushed past the kitchen door, she scooted a little closer. Her knee rested against Shauna's thigh now. It was embarrassing how much that little touch did for her. She blushed and looked over at Jackie, who was paying her no attention.

"25% rum, 25% vodka, 25% lemonade and 25% cranberry juice. Should be delicious."

"That actually doesn't sound that bad," Nat said.

Jackie laughed, "Coming from a bartender that's concerning." Nat shrugged and Van downed the whole thing in three gulps.

"Jesus Christ. You know you could've said no and just taken a shot, right?" Lottie asked.

Van shook her head, "No chance I back down from a dare. Jackie you're up."

Jackie looked over at Shauna and shook her head. She seemed terrified of what Van was gonna make her do. "Fuck. Dare, I guess."

"Van grinned, 'Kiss the sexiest person in the room.' Van raised her eyebrows like she was daring her as she said it. Shauna damn near shit her pants and Jackie's face fell. She stared at Van with what seemed like panic and Van quickly recovered," For the sake of all of our health and well being, I'm excluding Shauna from your list of options." Well that was disappointing. Jackie looked over at Shauna with an expression she couldn't really read before sighing and leaning to her right, grabbing Tai's face and giving her a peck on the lips.

Shauna didn't know what to be more bitter about, Jackie kissing somebody else right in front of her, the loss of contact on her thigh, or the fact that Van took her out of the running. She exhaled and put on a smile like she was unaffected. Jackie looked at Van as she pulled away and whispered, "That's what you get, Palmer." Van laughed and nodded her head, accepting her punishment.

Jackie quickly took the opportunity to move on, "Tai. You're up."

"Truth. These dares are getting out of hand, y'all."

"What's your favorite sex position?" Jackie asked with a laugh. Tai's jaw dropped and then Jackie's leg was right back where it was on Shauna's thigh, maybe even closer now. It was like a breath of fresh air.

Van wiggled her eyebrows, “Go ahead. Let’s hear it.”

Tai laughed and cleared her throat, “We um… I’m just gonna say from behind.”

Lottie screamed, “This is so much more information than I needed.”

“Oh, whatever. I think it’s fun. I wanna know everybody’s actually,” Nat said. Shauna swallowed and thought about hers. Anything where Jackie just took what she wanted from her. Anything where Shauna felt needed. She liked it when it felt like Jackie just had this burning passion for her and only her.

Tai nodded, “Honestly it’s only fair. Van you’re up.”

“I just like eating it, honestly,” Van said almost immediately. Shauna and the rest of the group broke out in laughter.

“Are we talking giving or receiving?” Nat asked.

“Either one. Whatever you like more,” Jackie said. Nat paused to think and Jackie blurted out, “I think mine would be a combination of yours, honestly. Getting eaten out from behind.” Shauna choked on air. She tried to play it off by taking a drink and just deciding not to breathe, but Jackie knew. She knew what she was doing. Shauna wondered if her new girl did that or if Jackie was intentionally referencing something they had done together. Shauna remembered it like it was yesterday. Jesus fuck. Jackie pushed her knee higher up Shauna’s thigh, which didn’t help the no breathing situation she had going on. It was barely a touch, and she was driving her crazy.

“Might be cliche, but I’m going with 69. What about you babe?” Nat said.

Lottie looked at Shauna for help. Shauna shrugged and went with it. “Don’t look at me. Only fair.” Shauna looked quickly at Jackie, who she noticed was staring at her. She looked back at Lottie, not trusting herself to answer with Jackie’s eyes trained on her. “Face riding. Or… somebody riding mine, I guess.” Shauna could hear Jackie’s inhale next to her and she tried to do anything but look at her.

“Oh my god, Shauna!” Lottie looked around. “You guys are fucking crazy.”

“Your turn, Lot. Give the people what they want,” Nat said.

Lottie covered her face with her hands and sighed through them, “Riding it. I like riding it.” Nat laughed and Van gasped, apparently unprepared to know so much about Lottie. “Who’s fucking turn is it?” Lottie asked, trying to change the topic. Tai didn’t seem too interested in it.

“Yours. Truth or dare.”

“Dare,” Lottie said, trying to move away from the sex position topic.

“Demo it.” Lottie’s jaw dropped and Nat raised her eyebrows. “Clothes on, of course.” Tai grinned, seeming pleased with herself. Shauna’s couldn’t blame her. Everybody was kind of enjoying her discomfort.

“You are such a freak!” Lottie squealed. Nat laid down on her back and put her hands underneath her head.

“Come on, baby.” Lottie laughed and hit her gently in her stomach, forcing her to flinch and sit back up.

“I think I’ll just take my shot instead. Thanks though, Tai.” Tai laughed and Lottie downed her shot.

“Natty? Truth or dare?”

“Let’s do a truth. I don’t feel like getting up.”

Lottie laughed, “Other than me… who in this room would you get with if you absolutely had to?”

Nat choked on her drink, “Like have sex with?”

Lottie nodded, smiling and watching her squirm. “Jesus Christ pass me the bottle.” Nat took the shot despite the boos she got for it.

Shauna spent the rest of the night wondering if she had taught Jackie how to have sex with this new girl. She ate her out from behind, now that’s apparently her new favorite sex position. Shauna was unaware of that. They had done it like three times, max. Really it was just another thing to fucking obsess over. A few hours later they were all passed out in the living room. Everybody except Shauna. Jackie was in the recliner, Lottie and Nat had crashed on the couch and Tai and Van were sprawled out on the floor. Shauna sighed, her mind racing too dramatically to sleep. She walked into the kitchen, remembering the way Jackie had stormed into it that night. Shauna remembered it with more detail than she would’ve liked. It had haunted pretty much every nightmare she had since then. She ran through the door with no shirt, no hesitation… just rage and hurt. Her eyes had been beat red and she screamed through her sobs. It was the most heartbreaking noise Shauna had ever heard.

She rested her elbows on the counter and closed her eyes, trying to get her headache to subside. She opened them at the sound of the door opening. Nat walked over, grabbed a cup and filled it in the sink. She handed it over to Shauna without a word. “Thank you.” Shauna took a sip and looked straight ahead, unsure of what exactly to say.

“Can’t sleep?” Shauna laughed. She almost never could. Realistically, she couldn’t remember the last time she had fallen asleep before three in the morning without melatonin.

“No.”

“You guys talked?” She could feel Nat’s eyes on her and shrugged.

“Not really. I asked why she never called and she said she didn’t know what to say. Then we’re in there and she’s kissing Tai and talking about her favorite sex positions… I don’t know. I feel like all of this blew up in the first place because I couldn’t communicate and now we’re here and I’m fucking begging for it and she can’t give it to me. I’m just tired.”

“Wait… you guys didn’t ever do her favorite sex position?” Nat whispered it like anybody was awake enough to hear her.

“No we did, but we only did it like three times. I don’t know. It just makes me wonder.”

"Okay well that one might be just your brain hating you, honestly. I feel like if she was trying to allude to doing something with somebody else she would've made it more obvious. Like it would've made more sense to just make something up. And her kissing Tai was a punishment for Van. Everybody knew that."

"She could've called Van on her shit. Told her no take backs and kissed me instead." Nat tilted her head at Shauna and she knew she was right. It wasn't that simple. Shauna would've been in here complaining about mixed signals if she had kissed her. "Yeah, whatever. This whole thing just fucking sucks."

Nat sighed and leaned her back on the counter so that they could make eye contact. "You could just be done. Actually go no contact and try to stop obsessing over her. Try to move on."

Shauna smiled, "We're getting lunch at 2." Nat laughed and let her head fall down to her chest.

"You're insane. Like… a date?"

"I don't think so. She told me she wanted to talk stuff out for your sake." Nat raised her eyebrows and Shauna corrected, "And Lottie's, obviously."

"Are you buying that?" Shauna didn't really know. Were their awkward interactions really that detrimental to Jackie's relationship with Lottie? They were getting along fine enough and if either of them were to feel weird about it, it probably should've been Shauna, considering how much shit they had to deal with when she was a fucking mess earlier that year.

"I don't know. Maybe I'm just the asshole here but I didn't think you guys were too torn up about our slightly awkward kind of friendship thing. You'd think essentially your guys' roommate would have a better read on it, but I don't know."

"Personally, I couldn't give two fucks. I just want you to know one way or another. She's keeping you in limbo with this phone number thing and the knee touching PDA thing y'all were doing. I just want her to fucking choose."

Nat was right, but Shauna felt the need to defend Jackie. "I hurt her. I have to rebuild some trust. Maybe our not date will do that. I don't know."

Nat sighed, "Come over after?"

"Deal." Nat nodded and headed to the living room to wake Lottie up and take her upstairs to bed. Lottie insisted she take the guest bedroom and Shauna thought it was probably a better environment for her to try to sleep in than three feet from a sleeping Jackie. She climbed under the covers and sat in silence until she drifted off.

Chapter 26

She got maybe two or three hours of sleep before she was up, out of bed, and in her car headed to the weight room. It was definitely a downgrade from Brown's fieldhouse, but it felt familiar at least. Nat had given Shauna her key to the locker room to shower and change and get direct access to all the gym equipment, since she didn't need it anymore. She lifted for a few hours and then borrowed a soccer ball from Coach Martinez's office and jogged to the field. She ran a couple miles on the track first, and then started doing all of her old footwork drills. She was rusty but it was actually kind of fun. She liked it more now than she did when she was on a state championship team. When her lungs were burning and her legs were shaky, she decided on a half mile sprint. It really took her legs completely out from under her, which was kind of the goal. She ended her morning with a quick stretch and a drive home. She pulled into the driveway at the same time as her mom, who had just finished a long overnight shift.

Deb pulled Shauna into a hug as they walked up to the front door. "You're home early. Did you have fun last night?"

"Yeah I did. I just wanted to get a workout in. How was work?"

"It was long. Tough shift, you know?" Shauna nodded and pulled her in tighter.

"I'm sorry, momma. Anything I can do?" Deb shook her head and gave Shauna a soft smile.

"No honey. I'm just gonna get some sleep. I'll be good later." Shauna nodded and watched her mom shut her bedroom door. She took a deep breath. Her poor mom was exhausted constantly, all so that Shauna could go to Brown. Maybe Rutgers would've been the better choice. English Lit degrees don't usually make any money and her mom had poured so much into it. She felt constantly guilty, which was only amplified by her not date she was supposed to get ready for. She looked at the clock, it was 12:30. She had an hour and a half. She felt sick, which could've been due to the alcohol or the excessive work outs, but really deep down Shauna knew it was Jackie. What was she gonna say? What had she been thinking? She sat down at her journal for 15 minutes before getting in the shower to just collect her thoughts.

I want her. I want her in my life, no matter what way. If she wants me to prove to her she can trust me I will do it. If she wants to get closer as friends I will do it. If she wants to just continue at these get togethers as casual friends, I will do that. I know I need to set some boundaries. I know I need to find my limits. What if she's dating someone? Can I still be her friend? What if she's just sleeping with someone? Can I handle hearing that and knowing that? Realistically, are any of my wants even fucking possible? Can I even risk hurting her again by trying to be okay with that shit? I don't fucking know. Honestly, I would never say no to her wanting to talk more. I would never say no to her wanting to see me more. I think I need to go into this willing to do whatever it takes.

She sighed, still feeling a little unresolved but better now that it was on paper. Once it went down in her journal, her mind always felt a little clearer. She got in the shower and stayed there for a long time. She wanted to smell good. She wanted to look good. She wanted Jackie to want her. Maybe it was wrong, but Shauna put on a black tank top a lot like the one she had worn the night before. Right, wrong or indifferent it had obviously caught her attention. If she wanted to feel wanted then the tank top was probably a good choice. She put on a pair of jean shorts and sat down to do her makeup. She put it on and took it off probably three different times trying to get her eyeliner just right. When she finally settled on something she felt good about, she put product in her hair and blow dried it to look effortless, even though it took her 20 minutes. When she got to the diner she found a table by the window so that she wouldn't have to wonder when Jackie was gonna get there. It eased her mind to be able to look for her. She took a deep breath and ordered them a couple waters.

She heard Van's car before she saw it and it took everything in her to not stare at Jackie as she climbed out of the passenger seat and walked into the building. She looked stunning. Every time Shauna saw her she was shocked by it, which was ridiculous considering how much time she spent thinking about her. She had worn a white button up that exposed just enough of her collarbones to draw Shauna's attention with a plaid skirt that had a little slit in the side. Her eyes were shining and her lips were glossy. Her hair was pulled up in a ponytail, revealing the skin of her neck. Shauna couldn't help remember how soft it was and how easily it bruised. When they were trying to be discreet she always had to be so careful. Jackie sat down and stared across the table at her. Fuck. What was she supposed to be saying right now? "Hey."

What a fucking lame way to say hi to her. Jesus Christ. Jackie smiled at her, "Hi." Shauna smiled back, probably like a fucking idiot as they sat in silence. It was awkward. This is probably why Jackie never called. This exact awkward silence.

"So… how are you feeling?" She was pretty drunk the night before and the hangover was probably killer.

"Good, actually. I thought for sure I'd be hungover or something, but nothing."

"Good, good." Shauna sat there, waiting for Jackie to say something, waiting for her to say whatever she had wanted to when she asked for her number. It was pretty clear that wasn't happening. "Jackie?" She was gonna have to just ask.

"Yeah?" Jackie took a sip of her water and watched Shauna cautiously. She had to have known what was coming.

"What made you ask for my number?" Jackie sighed and looked down, clearly uncomfortable.

"Um… well." Shauna watched her try to find the words. Jackie looked back up at her and continued, 'My friend, that bartender Renee.' The girl she had been hooking up with. That's why she called? That was not what Shauna was expecting. Did they break up? "I was just kind of talking about everything. She told me I was trying to make up my mind about stuff when I didn't have all the information."

…Okay. She was trying to make up her mind about Shauna? At least that meant she had a chance, right? "Oh, okay. What exactly were you trying to make your mind up about?"

Jackie exhaled and looked up at Shauna's eyes for a moment. "Just… how I feel about stuff. It's confusing, you know?" Shauna nodded. She knew that Jackie was confused. That made sense. "You… are confusing." Shauna was confusing? All she did was want her. Jackie's eyes met hers and Shauna looked over her face for some kind of indication of what that meant, exactly. Her eyes lingered for a moment on her lips and Jackie's cheeks got red. It was cute how easy it was to make her blush.

Shauna cleared her throat, trying to distract herself from it. "What are you confused about?"

Jackie sighed, "I don't want to say anything mean, Shauna."

Shauna had been begging for her to say something mean for what felt like forever. Shauna could handle mean much better than she could silence, "Just be honest. I won't take it that way." All she wanted was Jcakie's true thoughts and true opinions.

"You are the reason I can't go on any dates. You are the reason that nothing I do with anybody means anything to me. I'm broken in some kind of unfixable fundamental way because of you, but I can't hate you. I can't be angry at you. It's like I wasn't built for it." Shauna felt a wide range of emotions. Obviously she was fucking ecstatic that Jackie hadn't been on dates and that nobody meant anything to her, but that sentence… 'I'm broken in some kind of unfixable fundamental way because of you.' That fucking *hurt*. To know that she had really truly broken her just confirmed every bad thought she had about herself. She had *really* fucking hurt her. Shauna nodded, trying to process it. She looked away when she felt her eyes start to water and quickly regained her composure. She had no business crying right now. She had done this.

"So you're trying to figure out if you can hate me?" Jackie grabbed her hand and Shauna's chest tightened. That was not helping her effort to not break down.

Shauna looked up at her and saw tears in her eyes too. She shook her head, "I want to know why I don't hate you if I can't get over it, either." Shauna looked down at their hands all tangled up. She nodded and rubbed her thumb over Jackie's skin. It was reassuring to have that contact. Jackie continued, 'I mean, I tried everything.' She laughed, "I tried to journal for fuck's sake." Shauna looked up at her and chuckled too.

It felt wrong to smile. It felt wrong to laugh. That feeling in her chest got heavier and she looked away again, "I'm sorry Jackie. I never should have hurt you." Shauna used her free hand to rub at her eyes, trying to physically push her tears back inside. She needed to get a fucking grip.

"Thank you for saying that." Jackie said it and then glanced away quickly before finally, resting her eyes back on Shauna's.

Shauna choked out her next words, unsure of whether or not she could handle the answer, "What's your best case scenario for us?"

Jackie looked down at their hands and paused. After about a minute, she finally answered, "I think… I just want to be able to talk, you know? I don't want it to be awkward or weird."

Shauna didn't think it was awkward or weird. She actually looked forward to it, "Isn't that what we're doing now?"

Jackie sighed, looking up at Shauna again, “Shauna… I miss you, I think.” She missed her. Maybe she did want something more. Shauna couldn’t help but smile a bit.

“I miss you too.”

“I just don’t know what I can handle.” Shauna got brought right back down. It wasn’t exactly bad news, but it wasn’t ‘I’m ready for us to be friends’ or ‘I fucking miss you and I can’t live without you’ either.

“I’ll follow your lead then. You can call whenever. We can talk whenever.” Shauna would’ve done anything, really.

Jackie nodded, “Okay…” She had more to say and Shauna knew it. Jackie pulled her hand away, leaving her feeling more empty than she had expected, “Shauna, we can’t kiss like that again. It’s too much for me. It’s confusing.”

She nodded. She knew now that it probably hadn’t been kind, especially because she had apparently been trying to get over her. For a second, Shauna wondered how exactly she had tried. Had she slept with that Renee girl? If they weren’t dating then it kind of felt given that they would’ve done something. “Yeah, I know. I’m sorry I did it. I just missed you, I didn’t like how we left things… as hot as it might have been. I wanted to say goodbye the right way.” Shauna couldn’t help herself. She looked at her lips again and licked her own. She fucking wanted them. She didn’t want to never kiss her again. She brought herself out of it by looking down at the table.

“I just… I don’t want to go backwards. I don’t want to rehash anything. I want to start over. So, don’t bring up Jeff. Don’t bring up… us, okay?” It crushed Shauna, honestly. It was like they never fucking happened. It was like Jackie regretted all of it. Not to mention… she went from wanting to know everything about Jeff to now pretending it never happened? That kind of felt like going backwards.

“Okay. If that’s what you want, then I can do that.” Shauna would do what she needed to. If Jackie wanted to start over, then so be it. ‘Let’s start over then, okay?’ Jackie smiled and nodded, and Shauna forced one too. She reached out and offered her hand to shake. Jackie took it, “I’m Shauna. It’s nice to meet you.”

Jackie grabbed it and shook, “Jackie. It’s nice to meet you too.”

Shauna decided to play along. “So, Jackie. What are you studying?”

Jackie laughed a little and it helped Shauna with her plan. Faking it was a lot easier when Jackie was looking at her like that. Like it was light, like it was easy. It had been a while since Shauna had gotten that look. “Marketing, you?”

“English Lit.”

“Do you like it?” Jackie was being genuine now. Shauna could tell.

“I do, yeah.”

Jackie nodded sincerely. “Is it just a lot of reading or what?” Shauna laughed. That was a little oversimplified, but yeah pretty much.

"Yeah, it is. But there's a lot of writing too. It's hard and time consuming, but I honestly love it. What made you choose marketing?"

Jackie just paused to look at her for a minute before answering, "My boss talked me into it. I moved in early and volunteered at this community center. My boss there said he thought I'd like it and… I'm good at it, you know? I do like it."

Shauna smiled. Of course she was good at it. It all just seemed so… Jackie. "I'm sure you are." Jackie held Shauna's eye contact. She watched her smile and blush again. Did she really want it to be over? She wasn't exactly acting like it.

"What do you do for fun, Ms. Shipman?"

Shauna laughed. Not much, honestly. Recently, sit by the fucking phone waiting for a call that was never gonna come. "Well, my classes are insane. I don't do much, honestly. Go to Nat's when I need a break, or the bar she works at. I've got a couple friends from class that meet me there sometimes, but everybody's a little pretentious, you know? Classes are great, they're making me a better writer, so I know I'm where I want to be, but the people just aren't really a great fit for me so far. What about you?" Jackie's eyes lit up at the mention of Shauna not liking anybody. She was trying to ignore it all, but Jackie was making it hard.

"Well the volunteer thing is paid now, which is nice. I do that most mornings, then classes, and then after that I pretty much live off the cheap bar food at this gay bar in town." It was a gay bar. Interesting. That made sense, really. Shauna just hadn't considered it.

"Oh, I didn't realize it was a gay bar… that's cool. I'm guessing that's where the bartender works?" Shauna was trying to be cool about it, but she didn't feel that way. She felt the opposite of cool, but she needed to know more about her. Renee.

"Yeah. Renee." Shauna nodded, trying not to make it too obvious.

"So, are you like… out now?" Shauna couldn't imagine she would've told her parents.

Jackie shrugged. "I mean, I'm not like telling people, but I'm not really hiding it either. My parents would be the only ones I'd have to tell and even if I wanted to, they're never around long enough to get a sentence out."

"That's cool, Jax. I'm happy for you." She was. Jackie had really come a long way. High school Jackie wouldn't have even considered it.

"What about you? Do your friends at school know?"

Her friends at school. Was that what they were? Shauna barely liked them. "We don't really talk like that, honestly. I mean obviously Nat and Lottie know. I don't know. I don't talk about it much, I guess, I'm not really sure what label I would use anyway, and I'm not really dying to figure it out either. I'm too messed up for a relationship right now anyway." Jackie nodded. Shauna thought about what she said about her parents. Would it be bad to bring up her mom? Would that be painful? Who knows. They were starting over anyway, right? "I think my mom knows that there was more to you know… what happened with you, but I think she's just confused."

Jackie's eyes lit up. "How is your mom? I miss her so much." Shauna smiled.

“She’s good. The same, really. Still working all the time. I feel kind of bad. Brown is expensive, you know? She tells me that she likes to do it, so I guess it’s fine. I don’t know, though.”

Jackie nodded and looked down, “What did you tell her when I stopped coming around?”

When Shauna paused Jackie looked back up and Shauna couldn’t meet her eyes. She stared at the table while she answered, “I told her it was about Brown. I really don’t think she bought it but I couldn’t bring myself to say any of it out loud. Especially to her, you know? I think she realized how close I was to a breakdown because she never really pushed for more than that. We’ve never really talked about it.” Jackie nodded. Shauna could tell she wasn’t thrilled about it, but what did she really want Shauna to say? “She misses you too, you know.”

Jackie smiled, “Thank you for saying that.” Shauna nodded and they sat in comfortable silence for a while. Jackie leaned back in her chair and her shirt pulled up just enough to expose her midriff. Shauna’s eyes clung to the skin and she realized just how hard this was going to be. ‘So how the fuck did Nat get a job as a bartender?’ Shauna laughed, grateful for the break in seriousness. They spent the next hour talking about pretty much nothing until Jackie mentioned Renee again. That was definitely not nothing. That actually made Shauna want to kill somebody. Shauna mentioned that her, Nat, and Lot were all moving in together next semester and she responded with, “Oh that’s great! Me and Renee are too.”

Shauna felt her face drop. She didn’t mean to, obviously, but that was just so… serious? They were moving in together? The fire that had been slowly building in Shauna’s stomach was growing exponentially now. Maybe she wasn’t made for this. Fuck. “A two bedroom. Sorry.” Jackie spit the words out all panicked, like it would really make a difference. They makeout and do god knows what when they’re drunk and a spare bed was supposed to make Shauna feel better? She just nodded, “That’s exciting.”

Jackie blinked and hesitated when she let out her next statement, “She’s actually planning on coming to town next week. She’s gonna stay with me for a couple days while my parents are out of town.” Shauna wondered what they were gonna do while her parents were out of town. That’s pretty convenient timing for a couple of friends.

“Oh…” Shauna regained her composure, “That will be fun. Has she met everybody yet?” Obviously she knew the answer, but she wasn’t supposed to.

“She met Tai and Van like twice when they came to visit. They all got along really well. She hasn’t met Lottie, but she’s excited to. They’ve talked over the phone a couple times I think when Re was over.” Re? Was that what Jackie was doing while Shauna was waiting by the fucking phone?

She responded quickly before she could let her brain freak out, “That will be fun. I’m excited to meet her.” Jackie’s jaw dropped and her eyes got big. She had not planned on introducing them, apparently. “Unless you don’t want me to meet her. Sorry, I shouldn’t have assumed.” Shauna figured since they started over she’d be invited to the party but, maybe not. That was okay. That was fine.

“No!” Jackie said it too quickly, like she was scared to offend her. It was somehow reassuring, “No it’s okay. I just didn’t think you would want to, I guess.”

"We're friends, Jax." Right? That's what they were? "I wanna meet her, if it's cool."

Jackie smiled. It seemed like something less than genuine. "If you're good I'm good, but she's touchy and she's flirty and it's not something she's ever very good at hiding." Shauna narrowed her eyes against her will. She balled up her hands, digging her fingernails into her palms and trying not to absolutely lose it. "I'm not trying to be a dick. I just want to warn you, since you said you didn't want to see it or hear about it."

Shauna smiled at her. There was no fucking way this Re bitch was coming to town and Shauna didn't meet her. She needed to see her. "I'll be okay… besides, I'm a little curious now anyway." Jackie laughed and glanced down at her tits. It was discreet, but Shauna had been waiting for it. She knew it would come eventually. She smiled again and Jackie shifted her gaze to the window. Lunch was good. It was a step. It sucked, but it was good. Afterwards, Shauna drove Jackie home, trying not to convince herself it was all normal now. It felt like it. Jackie in her passenger seat just felt natural, like there was no other way for them to be. When Jackie got out of her car, she had to fight her instincts and reflexes to not tell her how much she loved her. Instead, she just watched Jackie walk up to that same front door, with that same smile and that same strut. When her door shut, Shauna exhaled. She drove home and changed into athletic shorts, needing to be back in the weight room ASAP. She called Lottie's house before she left, trying to get ahold of Nat so she didn't freak out.

"Matthews' residence. This is Charlotte."

"Hey, Lot. Is Nat around?"

"Hey Shauna. Yeah let me grab her." The line was quiet for a second before Nat's voice came across.

"How was your date?"

"Not a date. I'm headed to the gym. Just didn't want you to freak out. You can meet me there if you want or I can just come over after. Up to you."

"I'll be there. Give me like 20." Shauna hung up the phone and got in the car, ready to make her body feel as exhausted as her brain did.

Chapter 27

Shauna was just starting her bench press when Nat walked in and sat down on the bench next to her.

"This makes me feel like maybe it didn't go well? Because I know you already did this once today."

Shauna ignored her, finishing her last four reps of her set before sitting up and wiping the sweat off of her face with her shirt. "Maybe I'm just being responsible and managing my emotions."

Nat shrugged, "Both could be true."

"Re…" Shauna rolled her eyes at the nickname, "Is coming to town next week. Or this week, I guess."

"Oh?"

Shauna went back down and talked through her set, spitting out the words like they were made of venom, "They're moving in together."

Shauna heard Nat's long exhale as she finished her set. "So… they're together?"

"Apparently they're friends, but she pretty much told me she tried to get over me with her, which means they're probably fucking."

Nat looked confused, "So they're moving into a… 2 bedroom then? As friends?" Shauna shot her a glare. She didn't need Nat to be logical right now. She put her hands up innocently and laughed. "What did you guys talk about? You were there for a long time."

"Um, we're friends, I guess? She told me not to talk about Jeff or… us, so. That felt good."

"Wow. You guys have rules now."

"Yes I am also not allowed to kiss her because that's too confusing. But she can make out with Renee. That's not confusing for her." Nat laughed a little and Shauna closed her eyes, trying to figure out how to not absolutely lose it. "I swear to god if they start making out in front of me I might fucking kill her."

"Oh so you're meeting this girl now? We think that's a good idea?"

"She's coming to *my* town. Jackie wants to be friends. Friends meet their other friend's situationships or whatever the fuck they are. I didn't really ask."

Nat took a deep breath, "Well I'm excited to see your twin, personally." Shauna had forgotten about that. She wondered if they really did look alike. Fuck this was gonna tear her apart. She let her head fall in her hands. She was exhausted. Her body was fucking spent. She didn't want to do this anymore. Nat clocked it, obviously. "Wanna go smoke?"

"Yes. I want to go smoke. Please." Nat laughed and Shauna followed her out to the bleachers. They got there and sat in silence for a while, just smoking and trying not to think too hard.

"So… you're friends?"

"Yep. Friends." Nat nodded and that was pretty much it. Shauna was grateful for the weed and the company, though. Exercise was definitely not what she needed.

Thursday night came too fast. Shauna knew she wasn't prepared for it. She was over at Lottie's pregaming. Nat had offered to drive because she knew Shauna needed at least two shots before they showed up to their door. Lottie was excited, which was at least a little bit annoying. She was practically bouncing. "You know, Lot. You're a little too excited to meet her not girlfriend."

Lottie sent Shauna a look that said not to start with her, but Shauna was drunk and felt like investigating. "I would be excited to meet *your* not girlfriend too if you would ever bring one home."

"Whatever, mom." Shauna rolled her eyes and took another sip of her beer. Nat laughed.

"Look, if you guys are trying to be friends… then my advice would be to actually try. Maybe you should be excited as her friend, to meet Renee too."

Shauna took a deep breath and rubbed her eyes. She knew Lottie was right, but it wasn't that fucking easy. It wasn't like a switch she could turn on and off, and really she had never been not jealous of the people Jackie made out with. She had never fucking done this before. She had never been just friends with Jackie. "Okay. Look at me. Excited." Shauna faked a smile and Lottie slung her arm around her shoulders.

"It'll be okay. We'll be there the whole time. Whatever you need."

Lottie opened Jackie's front door and ran into her kitchen. Nat laughed and Shauna glared at her. "Who's side are you on?"

"You said you wanted to be her friend. I'm technically still on yours." Shauna rolled her eyes and took a deep breath.

"You ready?" Shauna nodded and they walked together through the kitchen door. Shauna found Renee almost immediately. She didn't really see the resemblance, honestly. Maybe she looked like Shauna in high school, when she was smaller and still had a bit of a baby face. She was prettier than Shauna was, honestly. She was upbeat and smiling. Shauna couldn't remember the last time she had felt upbeat. Maybe that's what Jackie wanted. Renee met her eyes and gave her an amused smile, which felt a little disrespectful.

Jackie spoke up, drawing Shauna's eyes away. "Hey guys! Renee, this is Nat and Shauna. Guys, this is my friend Renee." Renee walked up to Nat first and wrapped her in a hug. Nat looked over her shoulder and sent a very confused, concerned look to Shauna. She was next, apparently. Renee wrapped her in a hug that Shauna couldn't even think to reciprocate. What the fuck was going on?

"It's so great to meet you guys! I've heard so many good things. Want a drink?" Tai and Van both chuckled, which really just pissed Shauna off more. She went back to analyzing

Renee. She had this ridiculous wife beater on and a fucking chain. Really Shauna couldn't tell if she was jealous of her or if she thought she looked ridiculous. What she did know was that her hair was wet and it had dripped on her. She wasn't a fan, but she had to play nice.

"Yeah, please. I'll have a vodka soda. Thanks, Renee." That was nice. She could do nice. Lottie looked at her and nodded with a smile. It was at least a little reassuring.

Nat wasn't feeling quite so welcoming, "I can pour my own. It's alright."

Lottie stepped in and wrapped her arm around Nat's waist. "No babe. Come on, you're always making the drinks. Let somebody do it for you for a change." Nat hesitated and then handed over the bottle of whiskey she had brought.

Renee smiled at her and Shauna really really wanted to get in a fight. "I got you guys, go get comfy and I'll join you in a second."

Shauna took a deep breath, "Thank you again!" She tried to make it more… upbeat. Shauna sat down in the living room on the floor under Nat and Lottie on the couch. Lottie rested her hand on Shauna's shoulder and squeezed it. She was doing good, right? Van found a deck of cards and started to set up some new game. Tai seemed suspicious.

"I feel like if you're the only one who knows the rules it's bound to be rigged," Tai said.

"You think I'm gonna cheat?" Tai cocked her head to the side.

"Explain the rules then," she challenged. Lottie laughed as Van fumbled over her words. Jackie walked in with Renee and handed Shauna her drink. They locked eyes and Jackie offered her a smile. Their hands touched as they made the exchange and Shauna smiled back. She couldn't help it, really. Jackie intervened with the argument Van and Tai had gotten into and suggested truth or drink instead.

"It's clear y'all can't behave with the dares," she sent a look over to Van and continued, 'so we're just gonna do truths.' Everybody agreed and she continued, "Okay, me first. Lottie, what's one thing that you really admire about Nat?"

Shauna laughed, knowing Nat was gonna hate this. "Ugh, gross. Jackie what the hell?" Nat protested, as expected.

Jackie smiled. It was kind of nice, "Nuh-uh. Nat, it's Lot's question, not yours."

Lottie smiled at her and answered, "She takes everything exactly how it is, and goes at it all full speed. She doesn't overreact, she doesn't avoid things. It's really impressive, honestly. Keeps me grounded." Nat blushed and Lottie gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

Jackie looked at Tai sitting next to her. "Okay, Tai. You go."

"Um… okay. Jackie, who's your most embarrassing crush?" Part of Shauna expected her to say her. To turn and laugh with Renee and Tai and Van about how dumb it was that she liked her.

"Oh, god. Let me think." Jackie glanced at Shauna and she prepared herself. She looked away quickly before she answered, "You know Coach Johnson?"

Nat slammed her hand into Shauna's shoulder, propelling her forward, "No!"

Jackie laughed, “Don’t bully me, okay? She was so clearly gay and I think I was just jealous, but also her fucking legs bro…” Coach Johnson was SO gay. Shauna kind of understood it.

“Oh my god, Jackie. You should’ve just taken a drink,” Van said with a laugh. Shauna laughed too and Jackie smiled at her. It felt good. It felt comfortable.

Jackie went next, “Okay. My turn. Renee… what’s your type?” Shauna froze and stared at her. Renee paid her no mind, instead just staring at Jackie, fucking smiling. That was answer enough for Shauna. She didn’t need to hear the rest, but she really didn’t have much of a choice.

“Well… blonde, kinda perky, assertive… something like that.” Shauna looked at Jackie and saw her just fucking giddy. Fuck.

Jackie pushed her shoulder playfully. It was fucking flirty. “Okay, okay. Not too much now, Re.” That fucking nickname again. “You have literally gotten with like five girls this year and four of them were brunette. You play too much.” Shauna felt all the blood drain out of her face. The one had to be Jackie, right? She slept with one blonde girl this year. It had to have been fucking Jackie. She must have lied or embellished the truth at some point. Shauna looked down at her feet and took a long drink. She needed something. She needed fucking something.

Renee continued, “Okay, though for real… good communication. You have to be able to actually have a conversation with me. Nothing more frustrating than being shut out.” Shauna closed her eyes and exhaled. So, exactly what Shauna couldn’t do. Exactly what Jackie couldn’t do with Shauna. She finished her drink and looked up. Jackie was staring at her. She looked kind of concerned.

“Shauna, you’re up,” Van said.

“Um… Tai, who’s the biggest flirt in this room.” She wanted to know if it was Jackie. She needed to know.

“Ooh, tough one.” Tai looked over at Jackie and Renee, which felt like confirmation before just taking a drink instead. “Sorry, y’all. Not spilling too much tea yet. It’s way too early in the night for that. Nat?”

“Shauna, what’s one thing you’re proud of from the last year?” Nat asked her, drawing her attention away from her own head.

Honestly the discomfort of speaking highly about herself was just as bad as watching Jackie and Renee all night. “I think… I’ve grown a lot. I’m trying to give myself more grace, throwing myself into writing instead of, you know, bad coping mechanisms.” Shauna looked up at Jackie, who was refusing to look at her.

Renee spoke up, “You’re a writer?” Shauna looked back at Jackie, who still wasn’t looking at her and then to Renee again before answering.

“Um… yeah. English Lit. It’s been hell trying to figure out how to channel stuff in a good way, but I think I figured it out this year.”

"Oh that's so cool. I'm in grad school for creative writing. I can't channel shit most of the time, so that's really impressive, Shauna." Shauna looked over at the wide smile on Jackie's face and it felt like her chest was sinking in. Jesus fucking Christ.

"Well, if it helps, I'm not nearly creative enough to study creative writing. That's pretty cool too." Jackie looked at Shauna and her face fell. That made sense. She's happy and fucking chipper with Renee and miserable whenever she's reminded of Shauna. Fuck. This was actually the fucking worst.

Lottie spoke up, saving Shauna from that conversation. "Van, what's your biggest argument with somebody in this room?"

Van sighed and looked at Jackie. "Well… it wasn't exactly an argument, but the most pissed off I've been is when I caught Jackie trying to drink herself to sleep every night last summer." Huh? Jackie had a fucking drinking problem and nobody was concerned that her best friend/situationship whatever was a bartender and she spent every night at the bar? Van continued, "Do you remember that shit Lot, when we walked in on her finishing off her third bottle of wine in two days? God, I don't think I had ever really yelled at anybody before that." Shauna looked at Jackie. She had done this? This was Shauna's fault? It had to be. Every bad thing in Jackie's life had boiled down to being her fault, didn't it?

She heard Lottie's voice from behind her but she couldn't tear her eyes off of Jackie. She felt like fucking shit. "I'm just glad you didn't fuck around with that stuff for too much longer."

Jackie looked up at her and gave her what looked like a reassuring smile, but it wasn't really that reassuring. Really it kind of made it worse. How had Shauna not known this? "Sorry for the little scare, guys. I was all kinds of fucked up. I'm good now though, I promise." Jackie and Renee offered to get everybody a refill, and Shauna took the opportunity to go to the bathroom and get a grip. She needed to just breathe. She needed to not be so fucking angry all the time. Just… the ⅕ blondes thing was really fucking with her. If they had sex why wouldn't Jackie just fucking say that? She took a sip of water from the faucet and walked back out to the kitchen. She needed a shot. She walked in to see Renee and Jackie giggling while they poured drinks. Jackie had her fucking hand wrapped around Renee's arm as she poured and when Shauna saw it she hesitated. Maybe she should just leave. Not like leave the kitchen, like leave the house. This was essentially just torture. Jackie backed away when she saw Shauna and they locked eyes. She looked uncomfortable and a little guilty.

Renee excused herself, "I'm gonna go give this to Nat, can you guys handle the vodka drinks?"

"Yeah, I can get them. Thanks." Jackie said, never looking away from Shauna. Renee slid past her and Shauna walked over to Jackie and started to make her own drink. She made it a double.

"She's pretty," she said without looking up. Shauna had no fucking clue how to handle this conversation. Maybe she did just need to leave.

"She is, yeah," Shauna smiled a little. It was kind of laughable. Jackie really didn't care. It really felt like she didn't. "Are you okay?"

Shauna tore her eyes from her drink and looked at the door instead. She knew the second she looked at Jackie she was either going to get angry or completely break down, neither of which felt like a good idea. "Yeah, no. I'm good. I'm happy for you." It came out flatter than intended.

"Shauna, stop," Jackie grabbed her shoulder and Shauna's eyes shot up to meet her's. They were so fucking pretty. God this was all so stupid. Jakcie looked uncomfortable, Shauna knew she was. Why were they even trying this? "I told you it wasn't like that. It's not gonna be like that."

Shauna laughed. Yeah clearly. Renee just went on and on about all of her great qualities but yeah, it's not like that. "Why not? You're clearly her type."

"I'm not, actually. She's just playing it up. I tried to warn you."

Shauna scoffed and rolled her eyes. She was being childish but she didn't care. She was fucking hurt. She watched Jackie's eyes burn. She looked pissed. Good. Fucking feel something. Feel just a fraction of what Shauna lived with every day. It was only fucking fair. "Yeah, right." Shauna looked back to her drink, ignoring everything Jackie had said.

"What do you want me to do here, Shauna? I thought you were curious and wanted to come?" All she wanted was for Jackie to not fucking lie. If she liked this girl, if she wanted to fuck her, then why couldn't she just say that instead of letting Shauna feel fucking dumb all the time?

Shauna's head snapped up and she took a step toward Jackie. "The blonde girl she was with… was that you?" She couldn't help herself. If they were doing this then they were doing this.

"What are you talking about?" Jackie played dumb, like Shauna wouldn't have picked up on it.

"You said 4 out of 5 were brunettes. Who was the blonde?"

Jackie shook her head and scoffed, "There wasn't a blonde. She was a redhead." Shauna swallowed, oh so she had just fucked up then. She had been so sure… "I've been trying to fucking tell you, Shauna. It's not like that. I wouldn't lie to you about it." Shauna felt that familiar swelling in her throat like she was about to cry. Like a fucking child. Jesus she was so fucking stupid. Why was she like this? Why was she only ever like this about Jackie?

Shauna sighed, looking down and shaking her head. She was such an asshole. "I'm sorry… you just— you make me crazy, Jackie."

"You *wanted* to come, Shauna," It came out as a whine. Jackie was essentially begging her to just think rationally, waving her hands in the air and taking a step forward. Yes, she did want to come. But really what choice did she have?

"I couldn't stay away from you if my life depended on it."

"I told you, Shauna. You can't say things like that." Jackie looked her up and down, eyes lingering on Shauna's lips. How could she stop saying things like that when they got that reaction? When they actually got Jackie to fucking look at her?

"Why not, Jackie? I'm being honest."

“Because it’s confusing,” Shauna was staring at her now and she knew it, but she couldn’t stop if she tried. She fucking wanted her. She wanted to remind her how good she could make her feel. She wanted to fuck her on her kitchen counter. She wanted it fucking all, “And you have to stop looking at me like that, too.”

“Like what?” Shauna played dumb. She wanted Jackie to say it. She wanted Jackie to acknowledge it.

“Like you want to fucking eat me, Shauna. Come on!” Jackie was pleading with her now, “I’m really trying. This year without you has been so dull. I want you in my life. I just can’t handle all of this, please.”

Shauna sighed and walked over to her and grabbed her hands. Jackie was begging her to chill out and she felt so guilty that she couldn’t. She just wanted to comfort her. She decided to just be honest. “I’m sorry, Jackie. I’m trying too. It’s hard to see how happy other people have made you when all I’ve done is hurt you. I’ll try to trust you more, okay? I know you wouldn’t lie to me. I’ll work on my jealousy stuff too. I’m sorry.” Jackie took a deep breath. Shauna realized at that moment how close they were. This was dangerous. This was very, very dangerous.

“Hurting me wasn’t the only thing you did, Shauna”

“No, but I really made it count when I did it, huh?” Shauna laughed and Jackie didn’t. She looked so fucking good. How could Shauna have ever hurt her the way she did? “I didn’t know… about the drinking. I’m so sorry.” A fucking tear fell from Shauna’s eye and she looked away. She was so fucking stupid. She couldn’t be crying right now.

“How I handle my problems isn’t your fault,” Jackie squeezed her hand, “Just because you caused a few problems doesn’t mean you’re responsible for the way I avoided them.” No, Shauna was responsible. She was definitely responsible. She looked back up and Jackie held her gaze for a second before looking away. Shauna sighed and it brought her attention back. They were so close, but Shauna refused to be the one to cross the line. Not again. Jackie’s eyes were trained on her lips and her hand was gripping her fingers a little too hard. Shauna wanted it so bad. She wanted to kiss her, she wanted to love her and fuck her and do everything with her. She could’ve fucking cried at the suspence of it, just waiting for her to pull away. She didn’t, though. Instead she leaned in like she had been completely taken over by her emotions. It was soft and gentle, like Jackie was exploring her. She was taking her time and feeling every part of Shauna’s lips and she couldn’t take it. The kiss deepened and Shauna pushed her tongue into Jackie’s mouth. Jackie leaned in and pushed her body into Shauna’s, making her moan. Fuck she wanted this so fucking badly. She kissed her harder and Jackie reached up to hold her jaw, diving into it too before pulling away entirely.

“It’s hard for me too, okay? I’m sorry. I knew this wasn’t a good idea. It was too soon, you meeting Renee was a bad plan.” Shauna stared at her. She wanted more. She wanted so much more. Shauna looked at her lips and felt a pull in her lower stomach. They were red and wet. Jesus Christ. Shauna looked up and noticed Jackie’s eyes couldn’t settle on her. She knew she had to back away before she did something without thinking.

“Okay. We can figure this out. We just need to talk, right?” Jackie nodded. More talking. Yeah.

"Tell everybody I'm in the bathroom. I'll be out in a minute." Shauna nodded slowly before turning and walking back into the living room. Nobody asked where Jackie was, and Shauna just sat back down where she was before with her drink in hand. She felt Renee looking at her, but she didn't care enough to look up. Everything else just felt so small and insignificant. Jackie kissed her. Jackie had like… *really* kissed her. And she wasn't fucking Renee. Maybe they really were just, nothing? Shauna spent the rest of the night essentially silent, just letting her mind work through every possibility.

Chapter 28

Shauna woke up to everybody snoring in the living room. It was 9 am, and she knew they'd all be fast asleep for at least a few more hours. Her eyes settled on Jackie. She was asleep on the floor underneath Renee on the couch. Shauna couldn't help but smile. She was so peaceful when she slept. She was curled up with a blanket that covered less than half of her body. Her face was covered by her hair and she just looked so cute. Shauna stood up slowly and quietly and walked over to her, picking up the sides of the blanket and pulling it up over her shoulders. She wanted to kiss her forehead or brush her hair out of her face, but she knew she couldn't. Instead, she walked away and into the kitchen. She needed to direct her energy elsewhere.

Jackie's kitchen was kind of a mess. There were liquor bottles and mixers left out on the counters and dishes in the sink from what looked like the dinner Jackie and Renee must have made together. Shauna cleaned up the mess from their drinks, but left the dishes. Renee could clean up after herself for all Shauna cared. She looked in the fridge and realized how little Jackie really kept in there. There was a carton of eggs, half a gallon of milk, cranberry juice and beer. Shauna laughed. Looks like french toast was really her only option. She pulled out the ingredients and sifted through the Taylor's spice cabinet to find the cinnamon. She pulled out a clean pan and turned on a burner, finding it comfortable to dedicate her morning to feeding everyone.

She had made a bit of a mess by the time the bread was ready to go on the stove. She had spilled some cinnamon and beat the eggs up into her shirt. Similarly to her mom, she could cook, just not necessarily very efficiently. Things were going to spill, messes were going to be made, but really that's what makes the meal anyway, right? She started to pile the breakfast onto a plate and wipe down the counters, flipping the last piece as the sound of Jackie's voice scared her out of whatever breakfast making trance she had been in.

"Hey… good morning." Shauna turned and looked at her. She was so fucking perfect, with her hair now pulled up out of her face and her t shirt hanging loosely over her body.

"Fuck, Jax. You scared the shit out of me." She took a deep breath, gathering herself from the initial shock. "I'm sorry. Did I wake you?"

Jackie smiled and took a couple steps closer to her, peering around her body at what was on the plate behind her, "No, you didn't. It smells really good. When did you learn how to cook?"

Shauna rarely ate breakfast in high school, it was pretty much the only meal her and her mom agreed upon skipping or at least settling for a granola bar or something. When she got to college, though, she learned that if she didn't eat before a workout she *would* feel like absolute shit for the rest of the day. She had utilized Nat's kitchen enough to warrant paying a share of their utilities, but of course Lottie would never have let her. "Had a lot of time to practice in Nat's apartment." Jackie smiled and Shauna tore her eyes away from it, dreading the conversation she knew was coming. She looked back at her breakfast and poked at it, probably unnecessarily.

"I saw you learned how to cook too?" Shauna looked pointedly at the dishes left in the sink. "Or did Renee cook for you?"

Shauna didn't look up at her, not trusting what she knew would be a very obvious look of jealousy at her response. "No. I did. It was nothing crazy, really. Just some chicken and pasta." Still more than Jackie had known how to do when Shauna had known her. She looked up at her and saw Jackie's eyes glued to her arms and what used to be her back and was now her tits. She was wearing a tank top, obviously, but Jackie was being more than obvious about the way she was staring.

"Still though…" Shauna smiled at her. Jackie learning how to cook was a thing. She didn't need to downplay it for Shauna. She was trying to get past her jealousy and focus on the fact that Jackie learned to cook, not who she had been cooking for. "I'm sorry…" Jackie looked confused so Shauna continued, knowing that apology was probably warranted for several things. "About last night."

Jackie waved her hand, batting the apology away. "Oh, no. Please don't be." She said it like it was nothing, but Shauna had really frustrated her and she knew that. She wanted Jackie in her life and she had convinced her that she could meet Renee and then the second she did she couldn't stop herself from being a childish bitch.

"No, Jax. We set rules, you know? I shouldn't have pressed it."

Jackie smiled at her. "Well, I definitely broke some rules too, so let's just call it even." Shauna watched her smile falter and turn into something much different as her eyes darted down to look at Shauna's mouth. She wanted it again, and Shauna did too. She couldn't really, in that moment, find a reason why they couldn't just do it. They both wanted it. But then again, Jackie was saying she didn't. So Shauna turned back around, picking up the last piece of french toast and setting on top of the hefty stack she had compiled.

"Do you want a bite?" Shauna asked, watching closely for Jackie's response. She wasn't sure how to play this exactly, but the tension they had built couldn't just be for nothing. It was so clear Jackie was saying one thing and doing another. She nodded and looked down again over Shauna's body, specifically her lips and her tits. Shauna cut off a small bite and picked it up with a fork. She held it out to Jackie, but instead of taking the fork, Jackie leaned in. She locked eyes with Shauna and slowly bit it off the fork. Shauna's mouth went dry and her face got hot. She swallowed hard against her will. Really it didn't feel like her body was her own. All she could do was watch Jackie's eyes roll back and listen to her moan as she chewed. She was so fucking turned on by Jackie *eating* . What a fucking mess.

"Wow, Shauna. It's really good. I'm impressed." Jackie smiled at her and Shauna realized she never backed away. They were less than 6 inches apart. She felt like she couldn't catch her breath.

"You think so?"

Jackie nodded and looked down at her lips again, "Yeah, I do." Shauna felt herself sweating. She knew how much of an effect Jackie had on her and she knew she was being ridiculous, but this was… a lot. 'You've made a bit of a mess.' Jackie looked down at her tank top and then back up at her eyes. "Do you want to borrow some clothes?" Shauna exhaled. She was gonna get something new. Something that actually smelled like her again.

She tried not to get down on her knees and thank her, instead she just nodded. Jackie turned and walked up the stairs, leading Shauna to her bedroom. "You can take whatever." Jackie sat down on her bed and Shauna's eyes caught on how bare the walls were. There were a couple pictures, but not like before. She slowly looked through all of them, Tai, Van and Lottie were all there several times. There were a few of Renee too. Shauna was a little shocked to see that she had made the cut. The picture was from what felt like forever ago. She was in her practice uniform, stretching her legs on the ground. She knew exactly what it was from. Jackie was sitting behind her, smiling and rubbing her shoulders. It was cute. It was a good picture from an even better moment, before Shauna had ruined everything. She grabbed the picture off the wall and walked it over to Jackie.

"I remember this day." Jackie smiled.

"Yeah, me too."

Shauna knew she had the real, better thing sitting in front of her, but she couldn't take eyes off of Jackie in the picture. She was so happy, just sitting there rubbing Shauna's shoulders. She seemed so carefree. Shauna didn't want to face reality right that second. She just wanted to live in that moment for as long as possible. "Nat was so off that day. She had to have been high. I think all the midfielders ran like 10 miles that day thanks to her." Jackie laughed. "You were so pissed too… I don't even think Coach got a word out. All he did was point and we ran, you and Tai did all the yelling." Obviously, Shauna had hated it, but she also kind of loved it. Jackie was so in her element on a soccer field.

"Yeah… I like her now, but in high school Nat used to get on my nerves, seriously." Shauna looked up at her and laughed.

"You don't say?" Shauna asked sarcastically. "You know, you guys are a lot alike."

"I'm not so sure about that." Jackie looked away, not willing to accept it. A lot like Nat.

"No, really. You are. Especially now." Shauna sat down next to her on the bed, and Jackie turned to face her. Their thighs were touching and Shauna half expected Jackie to rest her head on her shoulder, like she always used to.

"What makes you say that?"

"You just carry yourself differently now, I guess. Before it felt a little… calculated. You're just you now. Comfortable." Shauna was looking at her, analyzing.

"In a good way, I hope?" Shauna watched Jackie's mouth as she talked. She nodded.

"Of course, Jax." Shauna felt captivated by the way it felt to just have a little skin to skin contact. She looked down at Jackie's thigh and resisted the urge to just push her back onto the bed and climb on top of her. She couldn't get the memory of the last time they had been on this bed together out of her head. She looked up at the headboard and remembered Jackie's white knuckles clutching it and the way she had looked at Shauna like she fucking needed her. She just wanted more. She wanted more touch and she wanted genuine connection with the girl, not just face level 'how have you been' conversations. She cleared her throat, trying to get her mind right. They were friends. She had to actually fucking try if that's what Jackie wanted. She looked down at the picture, remembering now that she had it and stood up. "Sorry. I, um… I'll put this back." Jackie nodded and stood up too.

"You know where everything is… I'm sure some of it is probably yours anyway. Just take what you need." Shauna nodded, pushing the push pin back into the wall to hold the picture in place. It was a little comforting to know Jackie hadn't burned whatever clothes she had left here, but it wasn't like she was sleeping with them either. The door shut and Shauna sat back down on Jackie's bed. What a fucking disaster.

She moved to her dresser, opening the middle drawer and finding her Radiohead t-shirt on the top of the pile. She had just washed it. Had she been wearing it? She dug through the drawer until she found a baggy blue striped button up. It was new. It wasn't something that old Jackie had owned, it was something that this new version saw and liked, and Shauna knew she wanted to have it. Even just to borrow, she wanted something that this new version of her could appreciate. It made her feel closer to her. She grabbed a pair of old black sleep shorts that were probably a little too small and left her dirty clothes on Jackie's dresser to grab later.

She walked downstairs and everybody had woken up. They ate, talked for a bit, made plans to go out to the bar later that night and then went their separate ways to nurse their hangovers. Shauna made sure to grab her clothes out of Jackie's room, taking one last look at the picture she kept on her wall. At least she cared. No matter what else… Jackie still cared.

They got to Shauna's house and Nat was immediately on her. "You did not fall asleep in those clothes."

Shauna laughed, grabbing three waters and collapsing onto the couch. "It wasn't like that."

"You guys didn't sneak off in the middle of the night to fuck before anybody woke up?"

"No. We did not. I spilled the eggs on myself and needed a change of clothes." Shauna sighed and closed her eyes.

"How are you doing with it all? With Renee?" Lottie asked.

"Um… I'm okay. I'm losing it, but I'm okay. I'm working through it."

Lottie nodded and Nat laughed, "You just seemed like you might have been spiraling a little bit."

Shauna glared at her and laughed, "I was feeling… jealous, I guess. We talked about it." Shauna laughed, remembering their 'conversation', "We've actually got more talking to do, apparently."

"Why's that?" Lottie asked, sitting down on Nat's lap in her mom's recliner.

"Well apparently I'm confusing." Shauna took a deep breath, debating if she should tell them the whole story.

Her hesitation was a little too telling, "What happened." Nat said it like she was already annoyed.

"She kissed me."

Nat groaned, "So… she kissed you, then you went to bed, woke up, conveniently spilled eggs on yourself or whatever the fuck and then just had to disappear with Jackie to her

bedroom to change into her clothes. All before any witnesses woke up to corroborate your story."

Lottie laughed and Shauna gave in and laughed too. It did sound ridiculous, but it was true. "The french toast was my witness."

Nat laughed at her and Lottie responded, "It is a little sus, Shauna. You gotta admit."

"It's the truth!" Nat squinted at her and reached out with her pinky. Shauna sat up and offered her own. "Pinky promise." That was all it took for them to get on board.

Shauna got up at 5 and made dinner. Chicken and pasta. She told herself it wasn't just because that's what Jackie liked to eat. Maybe it was just fresh on her mind. That was possible, right? Her mom got home at 5:30 and they all sat down at the table to eat a meal, something that didn't happen often at the Shipman house. It was nice. It was comfortable.

Shauna got ready for the club in less than a half hour. She showered, put on that same red dress she knew Jackie liked and very basic eye makeup. She wanted to get to Lottie's as soon as possible and start drinking. This was gonna be a long fucking night. She knew what was going to happen. She knew that she was gonna go into it expecting Jackie to look at her and to want to touch her or kiss her like she did the night before. She knew that Jackie would probably spend the night dancing with Renee, touching Renee, kissing Renee. She knew it would probably fuck with her. She knew she'd probably spiral. But Jackie would be wearing a tight dress. She'd have sexy eye makeup on and she'd be drinking. She couldn't not go.

She got to Lottie's and beelined for the kitchen. Her and Nat sounded like they were in the shower… together. Which was *wildly* uncomfortable to hear. She put a CD in and turned the volume up as high as it would go, hoping to drown out the noises coming from upstairs. It worked for the most part and it also let them know she was there, which was good. By the time Nat came downstairs she was three beers in. Jackie walked in holding Renee's hand wearing this fucking nothing red lace top and a tight black leather skirt. It was absolutely criminal. When Jackie's eyes found Shauna she knew she had made the right effect. They darkened almost immediately and dropped to her tits and then her legs. She dropped Renee's hand and just stood there staring until Tai pulled her into the kitchen for a shot.

They got to the club and Jackie seemed to have no issue parading Renee around. Shauna sat next to Lottie and Nat at the bar and just watched. Renee barely even looked at Shauna, like she was insignificant. Jackie wasn't much better. It was like she was making a conscious effort not to. She ordered three shots just sitting there watching until she decided she had enough. She was seconds away from walking into the crowd and taking her off of the dance floor when the most Jeff-looking man she could have imagined came walking over to her.

He bought her a beer and smiled. Shauna didn't care what he was saying, she just cared that it would probably piss Jackie off. They talked for a while about nothing and he even wrote his phone number on her hand like she was ever gonna call him. Jackie still didn't notice. She was too caught up in her fun with Renee. Shauna sighed and led him out to the dance floor.

Maybe if Jackie saw her dancing with notJeff the way she was dancing with Renee she wouldn't be able to pretend she hadn't. Shauna felt him pressed up against her and made sure she was still in Jackie's eyeline. She barely even felt his hands on her hips or his chest

against her back. All she could see was Renee's hands on Jackie's ass. All she could see was Jackie's smile at her touch. Just friends. Bullshit. She watched Renee's hands move up to her hips, pushing Jackie closer to herself. She leaned in and fucking kissed her neck. Jackie locked eyes with her and fucking moaned into it. She pushed her ass back into notJeff and Jackie was watching her now. She noticed and she was pissed. She could see it in her eyes that Shauna had struck a nerve.

Shauna decided she had enough. If she had to watch Jackie and Renee, then Jackie was gonna have to watch her and this random asshole. Shauna smiled at her and pushed her hair up with her fingers, really making it look like she was into it. She wanted Jackie to know she wasn't the only one who could let somebody else touch her. The man's hands moved up to her stomach, pulling her in and putting her wherever he wanted her. That was all it took for Jackie to come storming over. She didn't even look at the guy Shauna was with. She grabbed her hand and dragged her into the bathroom. She was practically fucking sprinting and Shauna struggled to keep up. She pulled Shauna right into a stall and locked the door. Shauna was way too drunk to even think about what was happening. All she knew was she wanted it. She wanted it so fucking bad and Jackie wanted her. Jackie grabbed desperately at Shauna's body, pulling her into her and kissing her like she had something to prove.

Shauna returned the passion and leaned in. She pushed her tongue into Jackie's mouth and they stumbled back into the stall door. Shauna pulled at Jackie's hair, moving her head wherever it needed to be to let Shauna closer. She just needed to be fucking closer. The feeling of Jackie's hands running up her body made Shauna shiver and she moaned when they found her tits. She grabbed hard at them and moaned into Shauna's mouth. Shauna was in no way in control of what was going on and she fucking loved it. Jackie touched her however she wanted. Her hands were everywhere all at once and it made Shauna's fucking head spin. Jackie kissed down her chin and her jaw until she got to her neck. Shauna was so fucking wet. She could feel it dropping down her thighs and she couldn't help her own reaction. "Oh, Jackie! Fuck." She watched Jackie become mesmerized with her tits, pulling at her dress to let them out. She got down on her knees and pulled Shauna's nipple into her mouth. Her beautiful, beyond fucking sexy eyes rolled back in her head and she moaned into Shauna's tits, flicking her tongue in circles in a way that could probably make her cum all on its own. Shauna felt her whole body tense with every pass and she pushed at the stall walls as hard as she could, trying to stop herself from cumming so quickly. Jackie pulled away and looked up at her like she wanted to cry.

"I need it, Shauna. I need you." Shauna moaned. It was everything she needed to hear. She pulled her other nipple into her mouth and held eye contact, moving her hands up her thighs under her dress.

"You have no idea how long I've dreamed of feeling you again, Jax." Jackie sucked harder on Shauna's chest and she couldn't take it. She was so wet she felt fucking empty and she needed Jackie inside her. She fucking needed it. "Please, baby. Please fuck me, baby." Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head and Shauna threw her head back and moaned. Jackie pulled Shauna's dress up over her hips and moaned at the state of her.

"Oh my god, Shauna." She could feel Jackie's fingers running through the wetness that probably covered her thighs.

"It's all yours, baby. Please. I'm all yours." Jackie pushed her legs apart so quickly that Shauna gasped. She ran her fingers through Shauna's pussy, feeling her. Shauna whined. She needed more. She needed fucking more. Without warning, Jackie pushed two fingers as deeply as she could inside of her. Shauna couldn't stop the scream that left her throat. She fucked her harder and faster than she ever had before. It was like she wanted to get her off. She wanted Shauna to cum. She held herself up with the tops of the bathroom stall and allowed Jackie to do whatever she wanted to her. Jackie dipped her tongue into her and licked gently, just slowly moving all over. Shauna moaned and just tried to feel all of it. She didn't want to miss anything. Jackie's lips wrapped around her clit and she started to suck on it gently. Shauna groaned and felt her whole body release. She ground her hips into Jackie's fingers and her mind went completely blank. She just felt her orgasm run through her entire body.

Jackie took her fingers out and replaced them with her tongue, pushing and licking and sucking. It was so overwhelming in the best possible way. Shauna felt one orgasm run into another but Jackie wouldn't stop. She wasn't done. Shauna's legs were shaking and she was doing everything she could to stay upright while Jackie's fingers pushed in and out of her. She felt tears run down her face as she squeezed her eyes shut. She had wanted this so fucking badly and she felt *so* good, but she couldn't take it. She wanted to take it. She wanted to just take whatever Jackie was willing to give her. Shauna grabbed her hair and pulled her tongue off of her clit. Jackie's lipstick was smudged and her face was wet. She locked eyes with Shauna and moaned, burying her fingers even deeper into her. Shauna could feel them curl up inside her and she threw her head back so hard it made a loud thud on the stall door.

"You look so fucking sexy like that, Shauna. Needy. Ready to please. Do you like how that feels, baby?" Shauna moaned at the words. She loved the sound of Jackie's voice. She loved the way she was describing her. She was really looking at her, really seeing her. Not to mention, the compliment alone was enough to make her pussy clench around Jackie's fingers.

She knew Jackie asked a question, but she didn't have it in her to answer it. She just moaned and watched Jackie watch her unravel again. Her legs were shaking so violently that Shauna had to put all of her weight into the stall door and try to use her arms to keep herself standing. Jackie removed her fingers and let Shauna breathe for a second before licking the insides of her thighs to clean her up.

Jackie looked up at her with her big bright eyes and smiled so innocently that Shauna couldn't take it. She grabbed her by her jaw and pulled her up off of her knees. Shauna kissed her and used her tongue to taste herself in Jackie's mouth. She kissed and licked down her chin, sucking gently to clean herself entirely off of her face. She made her way up her jaw and sucked gently on her earlobe before whispering, "You are so fucking beautiful, Jackie." Shauna let her hands roam Jackie's body for the first time in so long. She wrapped her hands behind Jackie's thighs and grabbed hard at her ass. Jackie gasped and Shauna picked her up.

She felt Jackie's thighs wrap around her waist and Shauna wasted no time pulling her skirt up and her thong to the side. She pushed one finger inside and felt Jackie's hands in her hair. She was clutching at her neck and her head and Shauna knew she wanted more. She added another finger and Jackie gasped, tensing up at first before allowing herself to be fucked.

Shauna switched their positions, pushing Jackie up against the door and roughly started pushing her fingers in and out. Jackie moaned and scratched at Shauna's back. She curled her fingers and started fucking her harder, using her arm underneath her ass to bounce her body to meet them. Shauna smelled her sweat and her shampoo and her perfume and she leaned down to taste it all on her neck. Shauna bit gently at the skin and then kissed it. Jackie let out a deep, guttural moan at the feeling and Shauna took it as an invite to continue. She sucked at the skin, knowing it would leave a mark but not caring enough about anything other than Jackie's pleasure to give a fuck. "Fuck baby, please don't stop. You feel so fucking good."

Jackie leaned her head back to give Shauna access to the other side. The second Shauna bit down on it she felt Jackie's pussy tighten around her fingers. She gasped and her whole body tensed up before coming back down in one big release. The sounds she made as she came sent Shauna into a fucking frenzy. She couldn't stop. She needed to hear it and feel it all over again. "I never want to stop, Jackie. You're doing so good for me baby, you feel so good." She picked Jackie up and pushed her back down, making her scream and grab at Shauna's shoulders and back. She bit hard into Shauna's shoulder which only encouraged her to keep going. Jackie rolled right into another orgasm and Shauna felt her whole body start to twitch uncontrollably. She pulled her fingers out of Jackie and set her down gently on the floor before turning her around and pushing her shoulders down so her face rested against the stall door. Jackie moaned when Shauna pulled her hips up to arch her back.

Shauna moaned at the sight of Jackie's ass arched up for her, with her skirt pulled up and her thong pushed to the side. She looked so fucking sexy. Shauna wanted to fuck her forever. She never wanted to leave this fucking bathroom stall. She pushed her fingers back inside of her and curled up to hit the spot Shauna knew Jackie loved. She moaned at the feeling and Shauna reached around to grab her throat, holding her in that position. Shauna moaned at the way she gasped and the feeling of her pussy wrapped around her fingers. She moaned at the way Jackie pushed back to get Shauna to fuck her harder and then finally, at the way Jackie's legs gave out when she came for a third time. Shauna caught her with a hand around her waist and held her in place as she fucked her through it. Jackie came again with a scream and Shauna finally let her up to breathe, holding her and kissing her as she calmed down.

Jackie smiled and laughed, "Fuck, Shauna."

Shauna tried to catch her breath and laughed too, "I know." Jackie leaned in and kissed her, wrapping her arms around her waist and running her fingers over the skin on Shauna's back. It wasn't until then that Shauna truly realized where she was.

"Tai and Van can't know Shauna. I'm sorry, but they would fucking kill me if they found out it went down like this." Shauna smiled. Down like this? What she wasn't proud of drunk fucking her in the bathroom? It registered that it kind of sucked that they couldn't just be together, but she was too fucking happy to be upset about it.

"Nat too… maybe it's just our little secret?" She agreed with her, even though she didn't really mean it. Of course she was gonna tell Nat. Nat wouldn't kill her. Nat would probably sigh and tell her she was being dumb, but Shauna knew it was dumb. She wasn't ashamed of it, not like Jackie was. Jackie smiled and nodded. She looked grateful and Shauna didn't regret her white lie. She reached down and tried to adjust her underwear to make it somewhat

comfortable, but Shauna knew it wasn't going to be. She came like five times while she was wearing them and Shauna knew first hand that they were fucking soaked. She laughed at her struggling and reached out her hand, "Give them to me."

Jackie furrowed her eyebrows, clearly confused, "What? Shauna what are you gonna do with them?" She just held out her hand and watched Jackie take them off and hand them over. Shauna found herself infatuated with the wetness on them. She loved the feeling of it and the smell of it and the taste of it. She ran her fingers through it and moaned, letting her eyes roll back in her head. Jackie whimpered a little bit at the sight of it and said, "You can't do that if you ever want to leave this bathroom." Shauna laughed. Who said she wanted to leave? She pulled her dress back up over her tits and put Jackie's thong in the bottom of her bra, underneath her right tit. She took off her own and put it in the same spot underneath the other.

"The growth's gotta be good for something, right?" Shauna joked.

Jackie was staring, mouth open and eyes wide. "Yeah they're good for a lot of things…" Shauna bit her lip and looked her up and down. Did they really have to leave? Shauna wouldn't have minded tasting her. Jackie caught the look and refocused her "Okay… no. We need to go."

Jackie grabbed her hand and led them to the sinks. They locked eyes as they washed their hands and they both knew this wasn't going to be the last time. Sure, maybe they'd try. Maybe Jackie would wake up the next day and regret it and feel like shit, but they were inevitable. It was too fucking magnetizing, it was too good to ever really warrant stopping.

When they made their way out of the bathroom they searched the dancefloor for their friends. Shauna saw Renee making out with the girl she had moved on from Jackie with and turned to her, assuming she'd be jealous or upset or something, but she just smiled. "Does that not bother you?"

"No, not at all. She's having fun, how could I be upset?" Shauna just shrugged, genuinely confused about whatever the fuck was going on with them. It didn't make sense to her, but whatever. They went their separate ways, to Shauna's obvious disappointment. Jackie smiled and grabbed her hand before wandering back over to Renee, Van, and Tai. Shauna sighed and watched her act like nothing happened before getting herself a beer and sitting down next to Lottie and Nat, who seemed to be fully immersed in their own conversation.

When they got back from the bar, Tai and Van claimed one guest room and Lottie discreetly nudged Shauna to get her attention. "The other one's yours if you want it." Shauna shook her head. She wanted Jackie to sleep in a bed, and she knew she couldn't sleep there with her.

"Nah, offer it to them. I'm good on the couch." Lottie raised her eyebrows but it didn't look like she had the energy to question it.

"Jackie, you guys can take the other room upstairs if you want it."

She immediately looked at Shauna, "No, it's okay." Shauna shook her head and glanced upstairs, telling her it was okay. She could go sleep in a bed. Shauna knew they weren't gonna be doing anything. Jackie would probably already be sore tomorrow as is. Jackie

slowly nodded and turned back to Lottie, “Okay. Yeah, thanks.” Everybody disappeared upstairs and Shauna immediately passed out on the couch.

Chapter 29

Shauna woke up to Nat's body weight on her legs. She groaned and kicked at her, not loving the feeling of being awake. "You need to get out of that dress, bro. Why didn't you change last night? It looks uncomfy as hell."

Shauna rubbed her face and pulled the blanket up over her shoulders. She hoped Jackie's underwear wasn't poking out of her bra. "I was tired. Still am, actually. What time is it?"

"Like 8."

Shauna shot up, "What the fuck? Why are you awake?"

"Never went to sleep, actually." Nat wiggled her eyebrows and Shauna groaned.

"Gross. That is an inside thought." Shauna turned over on her stomach and buried her face in her pillow. Nat started laughing and Shauna glared at her.

"I'm gonna get you a pair of sweats. Wanna go for a walk?"

"Are you serious? Why aren't you tired?"

"I don't know, but I wanna smoke." Nat didn't wait for a response and just disappeared up the stairs. Shauna sat up and adjusted herself, making sure hers and Jackie's underwear were tucked securely away. Nat came back and threw a tshirt and a pair of sweatpants on her lap, which Shauna took to the bathroom to change into. She washed her face and her hands,looking down and noticing notJeff's partial phone number on her hand. Most of it had washed away, but not all of it. She laughed and remembered the insane bathroom sex she and Jackie had the last night. Jesus, it was everything Shauna had hoped for. It was the first time Jackie told her she needed her. Fuck. She wanted it again. She wanted more. She changed into Nat's clothes, carefully wrapping their underwear up in her dress before walking back out.

Her and Nat walked to the soccer field and back, smoking a joint and laughing about literally every possible thing they could've talked about. "So are you gonna call that guy?" Nat asked the question and Shauna physically recoiled.

"What? No. God, no."

Nat laughed. "Oh so he was just an attempt to piss Jackie off?"

Shauna smiled and hit the joint, "Maybe." Nat laughed. Shauna thought about telling her what happened, but she wanted it to be hers for a little while longer. She didn't want the disappointment and the worry or whatever yet. She wanted to live in it a little longer. When they made it back to the house, Lottie was making coffee in the kitchen. Nobody else was up yet and Shauna was kind of glad. She liked her little family. She missed them lately. It didn't take long for Lottie to question her about notJeff too. She came to the same conclusion Nat did and they all laughed about it for a couple minutes before Jackie walked through the door wearing shorts and a cutoff shirt with no bra. Shauna's eyes clung to her exposed side

boob and she no longer felt as great about letting her and Renee sleep in bed together. She swallowed hard and then looked up at her neck. There were two ridiculously dark hickies, one on either side. She fought the smile that teased at her lips and finally met her eyes.

Shauna heard the disgust in Nat's tone before the words even came out, "Jesus Christ, Jackie." She looked at Shauna but Shauna refused to look at her. She knew Nat would know something if they made eye contact.

Lottie laughed, covering her mouth in shock, "Jackie! What the hell?"

Shauna sat there and watched it all go down, feeling very pleased with herself. Jackie was hers. She had marked her. She had claimed her. "Don't yell at me, yell at Renee." Shauna's mood instantly shifted. She could feel her blood start to boil. She knew realistically that Jackie couldn't just tell everybody it was her, but still. Claiming it was Renee pissed her the fuck off. She stared at Jackie, unable to take her eyes off of her and Jackie stared back before looking down at her hand. Shauna looked down too and remembered the phone number. She tucked her arm behind her back, a little embarrassed now that there was evidence of her scheming. Part of her kind of hoped that it would piss her off all over again and they'd end up in a different bathroom or maybe a bedroom or a laundry room doing it all over again. She knew that wasn't going to happen, but still.

"Renee! What the hell?" Lottie yelled loud enough for her to hear coming down the stairs.

"I know! I know! I'm sorry!" She yelled back, making her way into the kitchen. Shauna squinted at her, still not quite understanding her deal. She was wearing a shorts bra and a pair of shorts. She was skinny and had the V or whatever. It pissed Shauna off, and to make matters worse, when Shauna looked at Jackie she realized she was fucking *staring* . Shauna's fingernails dug into her palms. Jackie looked at her and smiled like she was fucking turned on by it. Jesus Christ.

Nat moved next to her, snapping her out of it and pulled a spoon out of the freezer. That was definitely enough of a distraction because why the fuck would they need to keep that handy? "Oh, ew. You guys keep that in there for this reason?" Lottie laughed and Nat just shrugged. Gross. Shauna was learning way too much about their sex life.

"Would you rather see the spoon or the bruises?" Nat sent a look of disapproval at Jackie, being clearly protective of Shauna.

"Is neither not an option?" Shauna made eye contact with Jackie and just for a second grinned at her. Shauna didn't want the bruises to fade away. She liked them there. She liked marking Jackie as hers, she always had. Tai and Van walked in a few minutes later.

"What's all the yelling about?" Tai asked.

"Look at what Re did to Jackie's fucking neck," Lottie said, pointing at her. Van gasped and covered her mouth, and Jackie removed the spoon, exposing the other one. She gasped again and started to laugh. Tai looked at her, smiled and then looked back at Renee shaking her head.

"You guys are fucking gross," she joked. Shauna and Nat left not long after, giving the rest of them the day to hang out and say goodbye.

They hung out, watching movies and drinking lots of water until Shauna's mom left for work. The second her car pulled out the driveway, Nat turned to her.

"Are you okay? You seem like… way too okay."

She probably was a little too okay. It wasn't like they were together, but she wasn't fucking Renee. She knew there was still something there. She knew they weren't done. "I'm good, yeah. Tired since you woke me up so early, but fine."

"Jackie wearing half a shirt and two big ass hickies this morning didn't fuck with you at all?" Shauna looked at her. She knew something was up. It was time.

"Can I tell you something without you telling Lottie?"

Nat thought about it, "Yeah I feel like that's probably okay. Jackie tells her stuff she doesn't tell me."

"Seriously, though. She can't know. Promise?" Nat raised her eyebrows and held out her pinky, which Shauna took without question. "I left the hickies." Nat's jaw dropped.

"The guy thing, that worked?"

Shauna nodded. "I was dancing with him and she lost it, dragged me into the bathroom. We had sex like… several times and then she said Van and Tai can't know, which means Lot by extension. It's a secret."

Nat laughed, "That's fucking insane. Those are *dark* , Shauna what the fuck?"

Shauna couldn't help but smile. She was proud of it, honestly. "I had to prove a point."

"I mean she just told everybody it was Renee anyway, so…" she said it with a laugh and Shauna smacked her arm.

"Maybe the point wasn't for *you* , Nat. Maybe it wasn't *about* you at all."

"So what exactly does this mean for you, then?"

"We haven't talked about it at all, so who knows?"

"This is gonna end really well, huh?" Nat leaned back into the couch and Shauna laughed. Maybe it would, maybe it wouldn't but regardless it was something. It was moving. One way or another it was Jackie and her. She would take it.

A few weeks went by and Jackie hadn't called. They had run into each other occasionally, but it was very surface level and Shauna could tell she was freaked out. She noticed the way Jackie would look at her when she thought no one was paying attention. She wanted to talk about it, but she wanted Jackie to come to her. She was trying to let her breathe a little. She knew it was a lot and she knew Jackie had a lot to work through. She was trying to be patient, but she fucking missed her. She really fucking missed her.

She worked out, wrote more of her short stories, read like eight new books and finished a journal in that time. She was losing it. She decided to smoke a little and before she knew it she was at the phone. She wasn't sure what she was looking for or what she was gonna say, but all she knew was Jackie felt like the answer to everything. She remembered her moans

and the sound of her voice telling her she needed her. Jesus Christ. The phone rang and she took a deep breath, waiting for Jackie's voice on the other side.

"Hey, this is Jackie!" She sounded so chipper. It was like her customer service voice. Shauna smiled. It was cute.

"Hey, Jax…" She wasn't really sure what to say. "It's Shauna."

"Yeah… I know." It was quiet and Shauna could hear Jackie's breathing on the other line.

"Well… I'm calling, I guess to say that I missed you." What the fuck was she doing? What had she wanted to say? Shauna laughed at herself. "Sorry… this is— I'm a little high right now. I couldn't work up the courage to call without it." The line was silent for a minute and Shauna was trying not to panic. She just wanted to see her. She wanted to just be around her. She wanted to kiss her and be close to her. Really, she wanted to do whatever Jackie did.

"Do you want to come over? I'm just watching a movie and drinking some wine. We could talk?"

Shauna didn't have to think about it. "I'll be there in 10." Shauna practically ran to her car, speeding the whole way to Jackie's house. She knocked on the door and tried to catch her breath, which became really fucking hard the second it swung open. Jackie had a tank top and the tiniest fucking shorts she had ever seen. Her legs looked so soft and Shauna wanted to push her hands under the fabric of her shorts and pull her in by her hips. She wanted to roll her tank top up and kiss all the way down her stomach. Her mouth fell open and she had to put some very real effort into speaking. "Hey."

Jackie smiled at her, "Hi. Do you want a glass of wine?"

Shauna swallowed and blinked, trying to chill out. "Yeah, if you don't mind." Jackie turned around and Shauna was fucking drooling. Her ass was hanging out of her shorts and her hips swayed back and forth the whole way back to the kitchen. Shauna shut the front door and walked further into the house. Jackie came back in the living room and offered her a glass, which Shauna gratefully accepted. "What have you been up to?"

"Just drinking a little, watching movies. Nothing crazy, just taking a little me time."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt."

"No. I'm glad you called… I'm glad you missed me," Jackie said with a smile. Shauna nodded, trying not to completely fucking lose it. She was being flirty. She was being fucking seductive.

"I was a little nervous to call, honestly. I wasn't sure how you felt about what happened at the bar." Shauna grabbed the glass and took a sip, avoiding eye contact while she sat down on the couch. Jackie sat down next to her so that their thighs were touching and Shauna made a conscious effort not to choke.

"Honestly… I don't know how I feel about what happened at the bar either." She took a drink from her glass and Shauna nodded. It sucked, but that was kind of to be expected. Obviously she wanted her to be excited about it, but it was a little unrealistic and she knew that.

“I get that.” Shauna was trying really hard to not be completely disrespectful and stare at her chest and her collarbones or her stomach and hips. She looked *so* good.

“It’s just confusing, you know?” Jackie wouldn’t meet her eyes. Shauna felt a little guilty. She didn’t want her to feel like shit about it. She didn’t mean to press boundaries or upset her. She hoped she didn’t fucking regret it. She hoped she hadn’t hurt her more than she already had.

“Yeah I know.” They sat in silence for a minute, just looking at each other. Shauna was lost in her eyes. They were fucking mesmerizing.

“I don’t regret it, though.” Jackie looked away as she said it, which was probably for the best because Shauna was smiling like an idiot. The weed was making it way too difficult to hide her emotions. “I don’t know what we should do, honestly. I know that it’s probably irresponsible, I know that we should probably really try to be friends, and that we need to set boundaries or whatever, but the problem is… I liked it. I liked it a lot.” Jackie looked up and Shauna saw just how much she meant it. She bit her lip and Shauna could see how wanting her eyes were. Maybe she had been just as tortured as Shauna had been.

“We’re not very good at that whole boundary thing.” Shauna laughed trying to break the tension and glanced down at her drink, deciding to take another sip. Jackie laughed too.

“We never have been.” Jackie’s eyes went dark and she looked Shauna up and down, settling on her lips and then her chest. She stared at Shauna’s hands and then her neck. It was like she was lost. Shauna knew the feeling. Her own eyes were locked on Jackie. She felt breathless, unable to think about anything other than Jackie’s fucking hands and her tongue and her skin.

“You make it hard, Jax.” Jackie’s eyes flew up to meet hers, now very aware of the way she was staring. “You look at me like that all the time. I know I shouldn’t, but all I ever want to do is act on it. It fucking kills me not to.”

“I’m sorry.” Jackie said, pulling her thigh back so it wasn’t in contact with Shauna’s anymore. Shauna grabbed it and pulled it back gently. She didn’t want to be further. That wasn’t her intention. Jackie blushed and Shauna’s heart skipped a beat.

“Don’t be sorry, Jax.” They sat in a silence full of tension. They were inches from each other, and Shauna took a deep breath before reaching out and pushing Jackie’s hair out of her face, tucking it behind her ear. She just wanted to know what Jackie was thinking. Beyond all the bullshit and whatever she thought she should or shouldn’t do, Shauna wanted to know what she wanted. “What do you want?”

Jackie looked down at her lap. “Shauna, I told you—” Shauna cut her off.

“No, Jackie. Not long term. Not ten minutes from now,” Shauna reached out and held her chin in her hand. “What do you want right now? In this moment?” Jackie looked up at her like she would rather die than look away. Their faces were so close to each other and it was immensely clear exactly what Jackie wanted in that moment. Shauna just stared at her, waiting for her to put it in words. She wanted her so badly, she just had to hear Jackie say it.

“I want you to touch me.” Jackie practically whispered it. Shauna’s hand moved so that her thumb rested on Jackie’s lips. Jackie was sitting straight up now, staring at Shauna who

was staring way too hard at her mouth.

"I am touching you." Shauna knew it was a little unfair. She knew Jackie was trying to tell her, but she wanted more. Jackie blinked, unable to take her eyes off of Shauna's lips. "I want you to touch me like you used to…" Shauna watched her stutter and then opened her mouth to continue, but she couldn't take it any more. She pushed her thumb through the opening of her lips and Jackie didn't hesitate to moan and wrap them around it. She sucked on it and her eyes rolled back.

"Your lips look so pretty like that, Jax." Jackie gasped and Shauna picked her up by her hips with ease, needing her on top of her. She needed her closer. She needed more contact.

She positioned Jackie so that she was straddling her now, and her hands wrapped around to hold her by her ass. Shauna moved up her thighs to her stomach and her sides, continuing at a steady pace until she got to her neck. "I'm upset they're gone," she said with a pout, fingers tracing where the hickies had sat.

"I'm sorry… there's nobody else to blame them on now, though. They would know." Jackie seemed unsure, like maybe she missed them too.

"I know…" Shauna tore her eyes away and moved her hands back to Jackie's hips. "Is this what you want?" Jackie cocked her head to the side and shook it slowly.

"What do you want, baby?" Shauna said it with a grin and Jackie pushed her down so that she was laying on the couch. She pulled at the bottom of Shauna's shirt, lifting it up over her head. Jackie gasped softly when she realized she hadn't worn a bra. She looked at Shauna and smiled. She just wanted Jackie to lean down and kiss her already. She wanted her to fuck her. She wanted everything right now. Jackie leaned in and kissed Shauna's neck, biting up and down it lightly. She moved down to her tits, sucking at the pale skin. She bit and sucked until there was a bruise forming. It was a spot that nobody would be able to see. It would be just for the two of them. She grabbed at Shauna's sides with her hands, making her moan and throw her head back. Shauna had had enough. She grabbed Jackie and turned them over, dropping to her knees in front of her.

"You're such a tease." Shauna said with a smile. She pulled Jackie's shorts down and leaned in, kissing her bare skin lightly. She moaned at the taste and the smell of it. She had *really* fucking missed it. "Do you get off on it, Jackie? Watching me try to control myself?"

"Fuck, Shauna. You know I do." Shauna ran her tongue through Jackie's pussy and pulled back again.

"Do you like seeing me jealous?" Jackie nodded and Shauna returned to that spot in between her thighs.

"I like seeing how badly you want me, Shauna." Shauna hummed into her pussy, licking gently at her opening.

She pulled away again, "I want you constantly, Jax. I don't have to be jealous, I don't have to be teased. I want you all the time. My whole life all I have wanted was you." She leaned back in and Jackie moaned. Shauna wanted to prove it to her. She was eating like she was starved. She had a grip on each of Jackie's thighs, her arms tangled in them so that Jackie was in the best possible position for her. Her tongue was deep inside her, moving back

and forth, sucking and licking incessantly. There was no rhythm to it, Shauna was just completely entranced. All she could feel was just desperation for more. She wanted so much more. Her fingers were gripping Jackie's hips so hard she was sure there would be bruises and Jackie was screaming as orgasm after orgasm ripped through her. Shauna wanted to make her cum over and over again, all night long. She barely ever came up for air, obsessed with Jackie's pleasure. Jackie pushed Shauna's head away, and she took the opportunity to breathe. She had been thinking about Jackie taking control for a year. She wanted it so fucking bad. She wanted to be the reason Jackie came. She wanted her to do whatever she needed to, give her whatever she wanted to. She wanted it so bad she could cry.

"I want you to ride me, Jackie. Please. Like you did that night. Just use me. Please."

"Oh my fucking god…" Jackie stood up and Shauna laid down on the couch eagerly. She had wanted it for so long. Jackie put one foot on the floor and one knee on the couch on the other side of Shauna's head, dropping herself onto her tongue. She went slow at first, and Shauna moaned into her pussy. She loved the way Jackie tasted. She loved the way she felt, but Jackie was being too gentle. She hadn't been gentle that night. Shauna grabbed her ass and started to move her faster back and forth on her mouth. She heard Jackie moan and picked up her pace, wanting her to cum on her tongue. She gripped harder at her hips and felt Jackie match the pace she had set. She fucked Shauna's face like that until her legs shook. She leaned back and put her hands on Shauna's thighs to stabilize herself. Shauna pushed her body back to her stomach, pushing her fingers inside of Jackie. She fucked her slow, holding eye contact and moaning with her. Jackie leaned back to give her a better angle, reaching back to move her hand to Shauna's waistband. She dipped below the fabric of her underwear and felt how wet Shauna was. Shauna threw her head back and moaned at the feeling of her fingers running through her folds. Jackie moaned and moved her fingers in circles on Shauna's clit. It took less than thirty seconds for Shauna to cum. She had been so worked up by the fantasy she had obsessed over for the past year. She couldn't have stopped her orgasm if she tried.

"Fuck, Shauna. You wanted it that bad?" She exhaled in a half moan half laugh.

"I've been trying to tell you." Shauna took a deep breath, trying to regain her composure when Jackie pushed her fingers inside, taking her off guard. They fucked each other simultaneously until the only sounds in the room were their moans and pants. Shauna never slowed down, but it felt like she was getting close again. She wanted her to cum again so badly, but she could barely focus and it felt like her whole body was on fire.

"Shauna, baby. I want to cum with you. I want it at the same time. Can you hold it for me?" Shauna whimpered and nodded her head, trying her best to follow instructions. Jackie picked up the pace with her fingers, effectively distracting Shauna. She couldn't help but slow down her own. She couldn't help it. She was so fucking close.

"Oh, Jackie. Please, baby." Jackie grabbed Shauna's hand and pulled it to her lower back.

"Hold me up, baby." Shauna did just that and Jackie used her other hand to rub her own clit. Shauna watched and she felt her eyes go big. It was so fucking sexy to watch Jackie get herself off while she fucked Shauna. Her mouth dropped open and she had to try *really* hard not to cum. She felt a tear roll down her face at the struggle of it. Jackie moaned and her legs started to twitch, "Cum for me Shauna. Now, baby. You can." Shauna screamed and held

Jackie close while she let herself release onto Jackie's fingers. Jackie collapsed on top of her and Shauna was relishing the feeling of their skin to skin contact when she heard Van's car with that beat up muffler pull into the driveway.

"Fuck. Shauna, that's Van. Get dressed, get dressed." Jackie threw her shirt at her and picked up her own shorts. Shauna ran to the bathroom to give Jackie more time to collect herself. She took a deep breath, throwing her shirt on and washing her face and her hands in the sink. She fixed her hair and took a deep breath, adjusting her sweats and her underwear before walking back out to the living room prepared to do her best acting job.

"Oh, hey Van."

Van sat down next to Jackie on the couch. "Hey… is it cool if I crash your guys' party tonight?"

"You're not crashing, Van. Don't be dumb. Want a glass of wine?" Shauna offered.

"I'll take a beer if you have it." Jackie jumped up and walked to the kitchen to grab it. Shauna sat in the chair across from their couch and cleared her throat.

"It's been a while, I feel like. What have you been up to?" Shauna asked, trying to start any kind of conversation.

"Having the time of my life, Shipman." Shauna nodded and looked at the floor. Understood. Van sighed and corrected herself, "I'm sorry. It has actually been hell, but I'm doing okay. Sorry for being a dick."

Shauna laughed at the bluntness of it, "No, you're good. I get it, honestly."

"She make you watch She's the One yet? She's been obsessed with it since it came out."

Shauna laughed, "No, not yet. I haven't seen it though so I'm sure it'll make the list the second she finds out."

Van laughed, "I wish you luck."

"Here, babe." Jackie handed over the beer and topped off her own glass with the rest of the wine.

"Thank you, Jax. So… what is this that we've chosen to watch?"

"Ghost." Van groaned and Shauna laughed, "No judging! You came way too close to the end to turn it off, so deal." She scoffed, but Shauna saw her getting into it within minutes. When the movie ended, Shauna finished her glass of wine and stood up. It already felt a little bit like she was intruding.

"Okay. I should probably get home."

"How much have you had to drink?" Van asked. It was kind of sweet she cared.

"Barely a glass… promise. She's good," Jackie answered. Van looked at Jackie, trying to figure out if she was lying or not and Shauna offered her pinky.

"I swear. I wouldn't drive if I had any more to drink." Van interlocked pinkies.

“Okay, I’m sorry. Just be safe, okay?” Shauna nodded and held eye contact a little too long with Jackie on her way out. She got in her car and took a deep breath before starting her very long drive home. She missed her already.

Chapter 30

They spent the rest of the summer sneaking around to be together. Jackie maintained that she didn't want anyone to know, and Nat kept her promise to not tell Lottie. It was energizing, honestly. They'd go out to the bar and Jackie would dance with someone else so Shauna would dance with someone else. She got comfortable with it in a way that she knew she probably wouldn't have without Jackie. They'd watch each other dance all night and then as soon as everybody passed out sneak away somewhere secluded to fuck. They'd call each other out of the blue and hook up, always in the middle of the day or like 3 am, when Jackie was sure Van wouldn't come over and catch them. It was fun. It didn't feel relationshipy, really. It was comfortable but they never spent the night, they never went on dates. Jackie didn't want that right now, and Shauna could understand it. She knew it was going to come to an end eventually, but she just wanted to enjoy it. She didn't want to waste their time together worrying or starting conversations she knew Jackie didn't want to have. If at the end of the summer, Jackie felt ready to do something more serious then that was great. Shauna didn't really feel the need to rush it.

She did *really* want to just have a full night to themselves, though. Her and Jackie had been conspiring for weeks about how to make it happen, but it just never seemed to work out the way they wanted. Shauna was journaling about it all, trying to keep herself in a good headspace when the phone rang.

"Hey this is Shauna."

"Tai's parents are out of town. Van is staying over there tonight." Shauna sat straight up, knowing that this was actually going to work out. Jackie was always scared to go to her place in case Van stopped by and needed a place to crash, but if she and Tai are spending the weekend alone… there was no reason her and Jackie couldn't spend all night at her place.

"My mom's working all night. Nat and Lottie are in the city dealing with their lease this weekend. Nobody would look for us here."

"Come pick me up?" Shauna didn't even respond, just walked out the door and got into her car. She made it to Jackie's in under 10 minutes and sat in the driveway waiting. Jackie came running out of the house with the biggest smile on her face. Shauna laughed at how excited she was. Jackie let herself in and Shauna drove them back to her house. Shauna opened her front door and held it for Jackie to walk through.

The second it was shut she had Jackie pushed up against it. She kissed her and Jackie moaned into it. It was slow and soft, like Shauna just wanted to feel her again. She had really fucking missed her. Jackie laughed into her mouth and Shauna smiled, feeling Jackie's hands grabbing at the skin on her hips. Shauna reached up and grabbed her jaw, holding her face exactly where she wanted it. Jackie pulled at her tank top and Shauna whined, knowing that if Jackie wanted it off of her then she was going to have to pull away from the kiss. She did it as quickly as she could, helping Jackie take her shirt off before returning again to her lips. She loved the feeling of them. She loved the closeness of them. Jackie's hands were cold and Shauna gasped when they reached up and grabbed her tits, pinching gently at her

nipples. Jackie smiled and pushed her tongue into Shauna's mouth. "I missed you," she said as Shauna moved down to kiss her neck. Shauna felt herself get wet at the sound of her sharp inhale.

"I really fucking missed you too." Jackie wrapped her arms around Shauna's neck and lifted her left leg up to wrap around her thighs. Shauna took the hint and grabbed the back of her legs, picking her up and pushing her harder into the front door. Jackie squealed and Shauna laughed, carrying them both up the stairs and into her bedroom. She threw Jackie down on the bed and her hands found Shauna's tits again, squeezing and pulling at them. Shauna moaned at the feeling and pulled Jackie's shorts off. She wanted her completely naked. They hadn't been completely naked together for so long, and Shauna was planning on taking every opportunity she could come up with in their alone time. Shauna let her hands run up and down Jackie's thighs and the sides of her ass as she leaned back down to kiss her. Her lips were so soft and they tasted like strawberries. Jackie grabbed at her back and pulled her in closer, whimpering as Shauna's knee found the space between her thighs.

"Oh my god… *Fuck* ." Jackie sighed and pulled away from the kiss, gasping and grinding her hips into Shauna's leg.

Shauna laughed. She looked so desperate with her little moans and whines. "Tell me you love it, baby."

Jackie gasped and her eyes rolled back in her head, "I fucking love it. I love the way you make me feel Shauna. Please don't stop. Please just fuck me." Shauna leaned over her, holding herself up with her elbow on the right side of Jackie's head and pushed her thigh harder into her. Jackie moaned and reached up to grab her bicep, sinking her nails deep into Shauna's flesh. Jackie started bucking her hips and grinding to meet the pace of Shauna's leg. She moaned in Shauna's ear and scratched hard at her back.

"God, Jackie are you gonna cum just like this? Is that really all it takes?"

Jackie let out a loud moan, "Fuck. Yes. You make it so fucking easy, baby." Her nails sunk deeper into Shauna's back and Shauna's head shot up at the feeling of it. It was the best kind of pain she had ever experienced. She felt Jackie's lips latch on to her nipple and suck, and her hand moved to Shauna's hip, pulling her closer by the fabric of her sweatpants. Shauna moaned and Jackie started to shake, letting go of her nipple to grunt through her orgasm. Shauna immediately dropped to her knees and kissed up her inner thighs. Jackie gasped and Shauna sunk her tongue into her pussy, licking from her opening to her clit over and over again, feeling Jackie's reactions by the pressure on her scalp. She looked up and saw Jackie with her hand covering her mouth and her eyes rolled back in her head. She was pissed. She was working so hard to hear her fucking moan. They had the house to themselves so that she could hear Jackie's fucking moans. Shauna reached up and grabbed her hand, pulling it down and pinning it to the bed. Jackie's screams filled the air and Shauna wrapped her lips around her clit, sucking gently and letting her tongue run over it in circles until she came again. Shauna fucked her though it gently, wanting to taste every drop of her cum and feel every wave of her orgasm.

She took a deep breath and tried to stand back up when Jackie kicked her back down on the floor. Shauna moaned as her back hit the ground and Jackie essentially pounced on her, pulling at her waistband with one hand and holding her shoulder down with the other. She

kissed down Shauna's neck, which she felt entirely in her pussy, before leaving a trail of hickies on her tits. She went over the ones she had left three days ago, making them darker and bigger than they were before and left new ones painfully close to her nipple. Shauna groaned at the feeling. She loved to be marked by her, but her tongue was so close to where Shauna needed it and she wasn't giving her what she needed. She pulled her hair down and Jackie laughed, licking way too gently and slowly circling around the skin closest to it. She looked up and locked eyes with Shauna before consuming it, pulling it entirely into her mouth and sucking. Her hand worked to pull Shauna's sweats and boxers down below her ass and Shauna tried to focus on helping her, but she was getting distracted by the way her tongue would flick so suddenly and the way her hands felt on her thighs. She was a squirmy, needy mess by the time Jackie had gotten her where she wanted her.

Jackie moaned when she pushed her fingers inside of her, and Shauna's mouth flew open in a gasp at the feeling. Jackie pounded her fingers in and out of her, just the way she knew Shauna fucking loved it. She curled her fingers up and leaned down to suck on her clit at the same time. Shauna threw her head back into the ground and came immediately. Jackie moaned and refused to stop, pushing her fingers deeper and fucking her slower but still *so* fucking good. Shauna screamed and the words just started falling out of her mouth, like they always did when she came undone like this. She couldn't help herself. She lost all concept of a filter or screening her thoughts, too overwhelmed with the feeling of it all to even think of it.

"God I fucking love you, Jackie. Please don't stop." Jackie moaned and picked up the pace. Shauna couldn't stop. Her legs were shaking and her breath was failing her. "I just want this forever. I don't want to ever stop. I just want you. I just want you." Jackie pulled her fingers out of her and dipped her tongue inside, which was enough to send Shauna into *another* orgasm before letting her catch her breath and planting a sloppy, wet kiss on her cheek.

"Thank god for Tai's second cousin's wedding," Jackie said as she collapsed onto Shauna's chest. Shauna laughed.

"Seriously. Thank fucking god." Jackie looked up at her and smiled. The first time she had professed her love midorgasm, Shauna was a little worried it would freak Jackie out, but it never did. Jackie seemed to always be encouraged by it and it usually resulted in at least another one. Shauna sighed. "I want to make you dinner."

Jackie laughed, "Oh really?" Shauna nodded. She really did.

"Doesn't have to be a thing. I've made you dinner a thousand times before. You've gotta eat, right?" Jackie bit her lip and looked at Shauna. She seemed a little unsure, but finally gave in.

"You're right. A girl's gotta eat." Shauna smiled. She knew Jackie didn't want it to be date-like and that she probably would've preferred pizza or takeout, but she deserved to be spoiled. She deserved somebody cooking for her and making her feel special. If she didn't want it to be a date, then it didn't have to be. Shauna wasn't gonna be the one to pop the bubble they had been living in for the past couple months. Jackie sat up and wrapped her hands around Shauna's thighs. "You look so fucking good, Shauna." Her eyes were locked on them and her fingers traced the outlines of her quads. Shauna laughed.

"I'm glad you think so." Jackie leaned down and kissed them, making her way slowly up the lines of definition. Shauna moaned and leaned back on her arms, spreading her legs to give Jackie access to whatever she wanted. Jackie hummed and kissed her opening, pushing her tongue inside and flicking it once before pulling away.

"You taste good, too." Shauna exhaled as she watched Jackie lick her lips and stand up. Her head fell back and she slowly sat back up.

"You're a tease," Shauna said, putting her sweats back on and turning towards her.

"You love it," Jackie said with a sweet smile that Shauna couldn't help but return.

"I do." Shauna turned around and grabbed a big t-shirt to put on. She had it over her head when she felt Jackie wrap her arms around her waist and kiss the backs of her shoulders, preventing her from finishing the job. She whined into her neck and Shauna's hair stood straight up.

"No, no. Please?" Shauna laughed.

"You want me to just be topless in front of all those windows?" Jackie pulled the shirt back over her head and turned her around, kissing her chest and her stomach.

"I'll go down there right now and shut all the blinds." Shauna was hesitant, but Jackie pouted and gave her another please, squeezing her tits and damn near begging. How could she ever even consider saying no? "I like looking at you like this. I like being able to see them." Jackie let her fingers trace the hickies and Shauna sighed happily.

"Okay, okay. Go shut the blinds quick I gotta pee." Jackie smiled and let go of her, throwing the shirt she had stolen from Shauna on and running down the stairs.

When Shauna came downstairs, all the blinds were shut and Jackie had lit a couple candles. It was romantic. Shauna found her sitting on the kitchen counter waiting for her. She was so fucking beautiful Shauna couldn't think of doing anything but kissing her again. She placed two hands on Jackie's hips and pulled herself into her, moaning at the feeling of Jackie's fingers tracing the skin on her back. Jackie pulled away with a smile and Shauna grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it off of her to reveal her perky boobs and her fucking abs.

"Only fair," she said with a grin, leaning down to kiss down her chest and run her fingers over the definition of the girl's stomach. Jackie moaned and Shauna threw the shirt as far as it would go and sucked each nipple into her mouth, savoring the way Jackie's legs squeezed around her as she did it. She bit down gently and Jackie gasped, playfully swatting at her shoulder and pushing her away. "Okay, okay. What are you making me?"

Shauna grinned and took one last look at her before turning toward the cabinets and grabbing what she needed. "I was thinking Fettuccine Alfredo. What do you think?" Jackie hummed at the sound of it.

"Mmm, Italian. How romantic." Shauna wasn't sure whether to take it as being flirty or a warning to not push it too far. Maybe she wanted to push it, though. Maybe the only way that any of this would ever amount to anything would be if Shauna pushed it. They had to talk about it eventually, and Shauna knew that. Jackie wasn't gonna be able to just get over

it. It wouldn't be fair to even ask that of her. Shauna was grateful that Jackie continued before she answered, "Sounds amazing."

Shauna smiled and got to work. She spent most of her time at the stove with Jackie's hands wrapped around her stomach and her chin on Shauna's shoulder. It was nice to be able to do something so domestic and be so close to each other. Shauna was living for every second of it. As she poured the sauce over the noodles, Jackie leaned in and kissed her neck, whispering in her ear as she did so, "Thank you for cooking, baby." Shauna moaned and Jackie bit down gently on her earlobe. The soft little 'baby' was probably going to leave a wet spot in Shauna's sweatpants. Her voice was so sexy and her hands were grabbing at her skin. Shauna couldn't help herself. She moved the pot of pasta off the hot burner and spun to grab Jackie's face in her hands. She pushed her back into the opposite counter and kissed her, letting her hands move up her bare back and grip onto her hair. Jackie pushed her tongue into Shauna's mouth and she muffled the moan that followed. Shauna was obsessed with the feeling of their tits pushed together and she ground her body into Jackie's, resulting in Jackie's sharp, high pitched gasp. Shauna grabbed her hips and set her down on the counter before giving her a quick peck and pulling away.

"We are never going to get to dinner if you keep calling me that." Jackie leaned back and caught her breath, which might have been the sexiest thing Shauna had ever seen. She was entranced and before she knew it she was back between Jackie's legs, kissing at her stomach and her tits. Jackie moaned and wrapped her hands in her hair, begging her not to stop.

"Oh, god. Just one more. I want one more. Please." Shauna's eyes rolled back in her head and Jackie's shorts were off faster than she could've ever imagined. Shauna held her close as she pushed her fingers inside her, fucking her hard and fast right there on the kitchen counter. Jackie moaned and lifted her hips to give Shauna a better angle, begging her to keep going. She took less than a minute to cum in Shauna's hand. It was fucking *hot* . Shauna laughed and kissed her again, pulling away to return to her pasta. Jackie grabbed her hand and pulled her fingers into her mouth, sucking them clean. She looked at Shauna's shocked and *very* horny expression and smiled. 'Thank you, baby.' Shauna moaned and turned back for more, but Jackie laughed and pushed her away. "Dinner first, yeah?" Shauna nodded, grabbing the plates and silverware and setting them down on the table. They ate over comfortable conversation and probably too much sexual tension, considering they had literally *just* had sex. They spent all evening completely uninterrupted. It was like they were never satiated. Jackie would make Shauna cum over and over again until her body couldn't anymore, and then Shauna would do the same for Jackie, which just made her wet all over again and created a vicious cycle. They finally passed out on top of each other around 4 am after fucking for 6 or 7 straight hours. It was perfect. It was everything Shauna had wanted it to be. She slept in until 11 am the next day and woke up to Jackie kissing down her stomach. She looked down and met Jackie's eyes.

"Is this okay?" she asked, to which Shauna enthusiastically nodded. Jackie smiled and pulled the blanket over her head. Shauna felt her tongue lick softly at her thighs and then move up to her clit, moving gently over top of it, before moving back down. Shauna was grateful that Jackie was being so nice, because she was definitely sensitive. Jackie's hands moved up her body to grab at her thighs and her hips, adding to the feeling of it all. Shauna relaxed into her touch, letting Jackie just feel all of her.

“That feels good, baby.” Jackie hummed into her pussy and Shauna moaned, feeling her start to increase the pace of her movements. Jackie gripped hard at her thighs and sunk her tongue as deep as possible into her opening. Shauna grabbed at her hair under the covers and wrapped her legs around Jackie’s shoulders. She felt her core start to tighten and pulse before finally just letting go completely. Jackie came back up for air and laid on her chest.

“Sorry, I had to. You just look so fucking good.” Shauna laughed and Jackie kissed her bicep.

“Please don’t ever apologize for that. You can have whatever you want, whenever you want. I’m yours, baby.” Jackie smiled and kissed her.

“Good.” Shauna laughed. It was hard to imagine she was serious about not wanting a relationship. She repeated it over and over again, and Shauna knew she wasn’t lying, but this just felt so good. Why wouldn’t she want it all the time?

A month later, Jackie was set to leave for campus. They still hadn’t talked about the future or the past, and Shauna knew it was coming. Part of her kind of hoped Jackie would just say nothing. She knew it would suck but it’d probably be better than the ‘we can’t do this anymore’ conversation that she had been expecting. Jackie called and told her she wanted her to come over and say goodbye that morning, so Shauna woke up to her 7 am alarm and headed over to spend as much time as possible with the girl before she got picked up.

Jackie opened the door and ushered Shauna in, leading her to the couch. “Thank you for coming over…”

Shauna sighed. Jackie was being all formal, this couldn’t be good. “Yeah of course, I wouldn’t ever let you leave without saying goodbye.”

Jackie smiled and then sighed, “Shauna, we need to talk about stuff. Like actually talk about it.” Shauna nodded and stared at the ground, trying not to let herself get too upset. Jackie laughed awkwardly and stuttered for a second. She seemed nervous, which was definitely another bad sign. “You have this fucking magnetism to you. I’m drawn to you, and I’m going to be drawn to you probably for my entire life. I don’t see it ever being any other way.”

Shauna knew she didn’t mean it in a positive way, but that’s how Shauna saw it. Jackie had to have been it for her. She couldn’t keep her mind or her hands off of her if she fucking tried. If Jackie wanted her Shauna was going to fucking be there. There wasn’t a world where she’d be able to tell her no. “Okay. That’s good, right?”

“Maybe…” Jackie grabbed Shauna’s hand. ‘I don’t know where you’re at right now with this. I’ve been thinking about us. I’ve been thinking about what we’re going to be like after today.’ Shauna nodded at her. She needed Jackie to just spit it out. She knew where it was going, and she had very little hope that she was wrong. “I don’t think I can handle this whole… thing we’re doing with you being so far away.” Shauna locked eyes with her and forced herself not to cry, “I know it’s so childish and so insecure of me, Shauna. It isn’t fair to you, and I feel like it’s gonna seem like I’ve just been using you all summer. I need you to know that isn’t true.” Shauna faked a smile and swallowed all of the pain she felt, trying to make sure Jackie didn’t feel like complete garbage. It wasn’t like she blindsided her. Shauna knew where this was headed the whole time.

"I know you haven't been using me, Jax. It's always been real, I never thought otherwise."

Jackie nodded and kept going. "I really don't want to be mean in the way I phrase this…"

Jackie hesitated and Shauna shook her head, "Just say what you need to say, baby." She could handle whatever it was. She just wanted to talk about it.

"I can't handle worrying every night about Jeff again…" Jackie squeezed Shauna's hand and stared hard, waiting for her response. Shauna wasn't really sure what to say. She was worried Shauna would cheat on her, which made sense. She had done this to herself. She knew that. A tear rolled down her cheek and she looked down, avoiding Jackie's gaze. Jackie took a deep breath and reached out with her thumb to wipe it away. Shauna took a deep breath and listened to the rest of what Jackie had to say, "Even though I know we wouldn't be in a relationship, we wouldn't be exclusive. I know that I couldn't be fair to you if we were still, you know… having sex. I'm so sorry, Shauna. It's not that I don't want to be able to just forget it all and start over. You have no idea how hard I've tried or how much time I've spent trying to convince myself I could be more mature or better about this. I'm a disaster, and I promise you don't want me anyway."

Shauna's head snapped up and she locked eyes with Jackie. She could handle Jackie doubting her faithfulness, she could handle her not being able to trust her, but she couldn't handle her thinking Shauna didn't want her. That was ridiculous. "Of course I want you. You don't need to be better for me. You need to be kinder to yourself. You're not a disaster, and regardless… That's kind of my fault anyway. I don't know that I would be able to ever get over it either if it were me. I did something really awful. I betrayed your trust, and I know that." Shauna's words failed her, getting stuck in her throat and coming out nearly silent. She cleared her throat and tried again, unable to make eye contact. "I just want to know how to earn it back… if I can earn it back."

Jackie sighed and sniffled. "A lot of things went into me losing my shit, Shauna. It's not all on you. I had a lot of things that I was hiding about myself, and I broke when the act I put on broke. That was going to happen with or without everything else." Shauna squeezed her hand, wanting to comfort her however she could. "I want to be honest with you, I don't know that a relationship would ever be possible for us. Or I think maybe we just need more time. I don't know…" Shauna just looked at her. She knew it was coming, but the words cut through her like a knife. She couldn't just leave it like that. They had to talk about it. They had to rehash it. They had to actually work through their shit.

"I'm gonna break the rules."

"The rules have been broken for months, Shauna. It's okay."

"We need to talk about it."

"We are talking about it."

"We need to talk about Jeff, Jackie." It came out a little louder than Shauna had intended, but it was terrifying to go against what Jackie had been telling her. She was so scared to lose her, but at this point it looked like it was going to happen either way. Jackie shook her head but Shauna continued, "You never asked me anything. You told me you wanted to know everything, and you never asked."

Jackie locked eyes with her, “What do you want me to ask you?”

“Whatever you’re still thinking about.” Jackie stared at her for a second before standing up and pacing in her living room. Shauna sighed and let her walk and think, knowing this was what they needed. It needed to hurt a little. It needed to be a little uncomfortable. She prepared herself for whatever was coming.

“Why did you do it? Don’t say you don’t know. I need an actual answer.”

Shauna nodded and took a deep breath, promising herself to be honest, “Jackie… I need you to know how much I love you. I need you to know that I have loved you since the moment I knew what love was, probably before then too. It was never about Jeff. He was just like this piece of you. I didn’t even see him as a person really, he was just an extension of you. I didn’t realize that you were gay. I didn’t think it would ever be an option, and Jeff… he was this very easily obtainable and easy to manipulate extension of you that felt like the closest I was ever going to get.” Jackie didn’t look at her, instead she just kept walking back and forth, staring blankly at whatever wall she was facing. “Jackie, look. I’m not trying to justify it and I really don’t want you to take it that way.”

Jackie didn’t look up at her and just said, “Just be honest. I won’t take it that way.” Shauna smiled. It meant Jackie was really listening. It meant she really wanted to listen.

“You were always leaving pieces of yourself on him. I don’t know if it was intentional or not. I don’t think it really matters, but your lipstick or hickies on his neck, that hair tie he would keep on his wrist for you. Jackie… sometimes I could smell you on him… your perfume or, you know… other things too.” Jackie turned and looked at her. Shauna tried to calm herself down, but it felt like it was happening all over again. All that self loathing and jealousy came right back up. ‘You guys would disappear for 20 minutes and I would know, but Jackie, baby… if I got close enough I could smell you on his fingers,’ it came out as more of a whine and less of an explanation. She couldn’t help herself. Shauna held eye contact as she continued. She wanted Jackie to understand. “It drove me crazy knowing that he got to touch you. Knowing that you had been touching him. I lost myself in jealousy and self loathing. I wanted you so badly and I felt like I couldn’t have you. It felt like my only other option was to try to hate you.”

Jackie flinched at the last sentence and tore her eyes away from Shauna, focusing instead on the wall. “Did you?” She took a deep breath, “Hate me, I mean.” Shauna fought her instincts telling her to just say no. She didn’t think so, but she wanted to be honest. She wanted to really think about it.

“I think I was very frustrated most of the time. I hated myself and I projected that onto you. I don’t think I could ever hate you, Jackie.” Jackie turned back around and they made eye contact again. Jackie sat back down next to her on the couch and Shauna could feel how badly she was hurting. She wanted to reach out, but she didn’t know what Jackie was thinking. She sat there, waiting for her response for what felt like forever.

“I just don’t understand how you could hurt me like that, Shauna.” Jackie started to cry, and Shauna couldn’t help herself. She wrapped Jackie in her arms and felt herself start to cry too.

“I know, baby. I was so selfish. I saw only myself. I could only see my own pain. You were so… perfect, untouchable even. The you I was hurting was like a completely separate person from the you I had in my head. It doesn’t make sense, I know.” Jackie took a couple deep breaths and sat back up. Shauna wiped the tears off of her cheeks and continued, “Jackie… I know you need time and space to work through stuff. I know that, but I need you to know that I want this. I don’t want to scare you away, but I will do anything. I want you.” The admission came with an embarrassing amount of tears. Jackie grabbed her face and kissed her. Shauna cried through it, clutching her forearms to try to stop her from ever leaving.

“I love you, Shauna. Just… I can’t right now.” Shauna’s chest felt hollow. She felt like every part of her had gone numb. She sighed and sat there listening to Jackie explain, feeling her emotions all shut off again. “I think I would make myself sick wondering every night, or worse… I could hurt you somehow. Maybe this will make it better. I just don’t know. All I know is that I want to be your friend. Could we please be friends?” Jackie’s eyes searched her face for her answer, like Shauna could ever say no. She nodded, unable to actually voice a desire to be just friends. Jackie wiped the tears from her eyes and took a shaky breath.

Shauna could tell she was upset with herself. She could see the guilt plastered on her face and it killed her. This wasn’t Jackie’s fault and Shauna knew that. “Jackie, please don’t beat yourself up. You’ve been honest and transparent all summer. You’ve told me over and over again you don’t want a relationship, and I never did anything or acted on anything with the assumption that it would end up that way.” Jackie started to really cry now. Hot tears streamed down her face and Shauna panicked. “Baby, baby… calm down. How about this? Let’s set some rules okay? Real ones. Not the kind that we just ignore. You can call whenever. I will leave you my new number. No commitment, no expectations. Do whatever you need to do, and I will too. Nothing has to change, and we can be friends and you can take whatever time and space you need. Okay?”

Jackie nodded. She grabbed Shauna’s face and kissed her softly, gently. “I’m so sorry, Shauna.” It fucking hurt. It hurt to choke everything down and try to help Jackie through this. It hurt to kiss her, knowing that she might never do it again. It was fucking miserable, but Shauna needed to get over herself. Jackie needed her to be okay with this.

“Don’t be sorry. I want you in my life. I want to be able to call you with life updates. I want to be able to be around you without any of our old shit hanging in the air between us. If you need to be friends, then I want to be your friend. Nothing else. I’m okay with that.” She lied and Jackie nodded.

“Okay. What rules should we set?” Jackie sniffled and straightened herself on the couch, preparing herself for the second half of this conversation.

Shauna sighed, she had to say it, even though everything inside her was begging her not to. “No fucking. No kissing.” Jackie nodded and looked her up and down. It seemed like she didn’t even fucking know she did it. Shauna sighed, “If you want me to stick to those you gotta please stop looking at me the way you do, though.”

Jackie smiled, “Well you can’t put on a show dancing on some randoms staring at me the whole time if you want me to follow the rules.” Shauna laughed, grateful for some kind of break in the tension.

“Okay. Let’s try to avoid being alone in rooms together when we’ve been drinking,” Shauna suggested. Jackie nodded.

“Okay. I think we can do this, yeah?” Shauna looked down and nodded, trying to blink away the tears in her eyes. This was important to Jackie, so she had to figure it out.

It felt like the conversation had ended, but Shauna wasn’t ready to leave yet. She just didn’t have it in her. “Can we just lay here for a while?”

Jackie nodded and laid them both down on the couch, holding Shauna tightly and running her fingers through her hair. They laid like that for an hour or so before Jackie gently reminded her that Tai and Van were gonna be there in a half hour. Oh, right. This was all just supposed to have never happened. Shauna stood up, kissed her goodbye and made sure Jackie had packed her number away. “We’ll be okay, Jax. I promise.” Jackie nodded and Shauna left, waiting until she got to the high school parking lot to break down completely.

Chapter 31

Shauna was three and a half hours into her workout when she heard Nat walk in. She made eye contact with her in the mirror and picked up the barbell to start her next set of squats.

Shauna repped them out and Nat sat down next to her on the floor. She racked the bar and looked at herself in the mirror. She wore a grey sweatshirt to Jackie's and it was completely drenched in sweat now. She looked pale and she honestly felt a little light headed. "Lottie told me Jackie left this morning. I went by your house but you weren't there. Probably should've come here first, honestly." Shauna looked down and picked the bar back up, on to set two. "I take it everything went well, then?"

"Great," Shauna grunted out through her last rep. Shauna looked back at her and watched her roll her eyes and then reach in her pockets. She pulled out a protein bar and tossed it to Shauna.

"You look like shit." Shauna nodded and sat down, unwrapping it and taking a bite.

"Thank you."

Nat nodded. "Did you guys talk?"

"She thinks I'm gonna cheat on her. Or actually, she doesn't want to be exclusive but knows she couldn't handle the thought of me sleeping with other people." Nat sighed. Shauna looked down and rubbed her eyes with her hands, "I told her that I loved her and I wanted her and that I'd do anything to earn her trust back and she told me she wasn't sure if it was ever going to happen. She told me she wanted to be friends."

"Please tell me you told her to go fuck herself," Nat practically begged her.

Shauna laughed, "We made new rules. Real ones. No kissing, no fucking, no being drunk and alone in a room." She sighed and looked up at Nat. "I knew where this was going, I know I'm an idiot. I just realized like half way through the conversation that I was gonna lose her again and I panicked. We talked about Jeff. I explained it. She seemed like she understood and was maybe starting to process but it didn't really matter to her. She wants to go back to Rutgers and fuck somebody else apparently. Probably her new roommate." Shauna retreated back into herself, not wanting to cry any more, but Nat walked up behind her and wrapped her arms around her nasty, sweaty shoulders. Shauna broke down. She sobbed like a baby and Nat held her the whole time, rocking her back and forth and running her fingers through her hair to try to calm her down. Shauna didn't need to be strong, she didn't need to swallow her emotions, she just let Nat have them.

"You did everything she asked you to, Shauna. It's okay. You're gonna be okay." It just didn't feel that way. It really didn't fucking feel that way. They were gonna be friends? Seriously? Jackie and Renee would start dating and then what? She's just supposed to be supportive? She's supposed to watch that and not beat somebody's ass? Shauna cried harder

and Nat squeezed her. It helped, actually. The pressure of it seemed to slow down her heart rate and she went from sobbing to just hyperventilating. Eventually, she calmed down.

"Can we go home, please?" Shauna asked. Nat nodded against Shauna's cheek and helped her up.

"Give me your keys." Shauna handed them over and got in her passenger seat, staring out the window the whole way back to her house. Nat walked in and Shauna fell into the couch.

"I'm sorry." Nat shook her head and sat down underneath Shauna's legs.

"Don't be. You love hard. It's not a bad thing. Maybe sometimes you just have to know when someone doesn't want it anymore." Shauna sighed and stared at the window. "I know she loves you, Shauna. Everybody with eyes knows she does, but maybe she just doesn't have it in her to accept your love right now. Maybe you just need to at least try to find somebody who does."

Shauna sat there silently. She didn't want anybody else. She wanted Jackie. Nat sighed, "You have 24 hours to sit in it and wallow and do whatever you need to do, but when we get back to campus we're going out and we're having fun. Jackie be damned." Nat stood up, not allowing room for discussion and got Shauna a water and herself a beer. She sifted through Shauna's tapes until she found Natural Born Killers. She lifted Shauna's legs up and sat back down where she had been before. They spent all day like that, cycling through any movie Nat accepted as "not horribly fucking depressing".

The next day she moved back to Providence. They lived in the same apartment complex that Nat and Lottie had last year, just a different unit. It was familiar and comfortable and all those good things. Shauna didn't feel the need to mess with Nat and Lottie's decor, it already felt pretty perfect, so she just moved everything into the smaller bedroom and plugged her phone in. She was hanging up her pictures when she got a call.

"Hey, this is Shauna."

"Shauna!" Jackie's voice probably doubled Shauna's heart rate. It hurt a little bit to be talking to her after their last conversation, but she was excited to hear from her. "I wasn't sure if you'd be there yet, honestly."

"Hey, Jax. Yeah, we got here a couple hours ago. I'm just finishing putting pictures up and everything."

"Oh good. How do you like it?"

"It's nice. Pretty much the same as their apartment last year. It's comfy."

"Good, good." They sat in silence for a second, apparently having forgotten how to speak to each other when they're not planning the next time they can have sex.

Shauna cleared her throat, "How is it over there? Living with Renee." Jackie exhaled audibly, but maintained her chipper tone.

"It's really good. Tai and Van stayed the night and we all caught up. We're all settled and decorated. It's good." Shauna wasn't really sure what to say. She didn't want to be an asshole and she didn't want to be bitter, but that's just how she felt. Bitter.

“I’m glad, Jax.” They sat in silence for a while. It was awkward. It was definitely awkward.

“Okay, well I’ll let you get unpacked and everything. Call me tomorrow?”

“Yeah, for sure.” If Jackie wanted her to call, she’d call. She’d rather sit in awkward silence than ever go a day without hearing from her.

That night, Nat dragged Shauna out to the club, as promised. Lottie went with them, still apparently oblivious to the fact that her and Jackie had just kind of broken up. They got there and ordered a round of shots and beers. It was weird to be at a club without Jackie now. It was weird to try to dance without her there to watch. Jackie had been half the fun of it all summer. She started off just sitting at the bar, drinking and watching Nat and Lottie have fun together. She was pulled away by the familiar face sitting next to her. “You do a lot of watching, you know that?” Shauna laughed. It was that Ava girl from last semester.

“Yeah, I’ve been told.” Ava smiled.

“Shauna, right? Soccer?

“Soccered, technically. Past tense.”

“Is that right? Doesn’t feel like a word.”

“It’s definitely not,” Shauna laughed and took another drink of her beer. “Ava, Lacrosse.”

She nodded. “You here with your friend again?”

Shauna looked out into the crowd, “Yeah. Nat. She’s with Lottie tonight actually, I’m sure she’ll say hi eventually.” Ava followed her gaze and her eyes landed on Lottie and Nat dancing together.

“Oh shit, they’re together?”

Shauna laughed. Like that wasn’t obvious. “Yeah. Have been for like a year and some change now? Something like that.” She watched Ava nod her head. She looked a little disappointed. “Sorry, were you interested?”

“Oh, no. A friend of mine was, but I’ve got a girlfriend now actually.”

“Oh, no shit. Congratulations!” Ava smiled and thanked her.

“You’re single, right?”

Shauna laughed and took a drink, “Yes. 100% single.” It tasted bad on her tongue. Wasn’t she supposed to be Jackie’s?

“My whole team is coming here to hang out in a couple weeks. We play some fall games out of state next weekend, but we have the next one off. You should come. We’re meeting up on Saturday. I think you’d have fun.” Shauna thought about it. Maybe that would be good for her. Maybe meeting new people would help her figure out if she was ever gonna be able to move on from the mess that she had made of her life with Jackie Taylor.

“Okay, deal. I’ll be here.” Ava nodded and Shauna made her way to the dance floor to find Nat and Lottie. The rest of the night was fun. She danced with people that meant

nothing to her and it wasn't the worst thing to ever happen to her. It was okay. She was okay.

The next morning she woke up painfully early and started to make breakfast. She made a little extra to leave behind for Nat and Lottie and ran to the gym. She had missed all the machines and the fancy free weight stuff. She worked out for a few hours and then ran back home to journal. She decided that if she started out with a good, solid routine, maybe her whole life wouldn't fall apart when Jackie started pulling away from her. Shauna did some assigned readings and called Jackie around 3. It was awkward again, but less than it had been the day before. She assumed it would just come with time.

Classes started and it got easier to not obsess over her summer with Jackie. Her in class friend group was excited to see her, which made her feel a little better. They made plans to get takeout and proofread their first assignments of the year. It was kind of nice, Shauna decided. Two weeks went by and she talked to Jackie every day. It wasn't exactly on a schedule, and more times than not Shauna would get a call after Jackie got back from the bar insanely late at night, but she didn't mind. Shauna hadn't been doing much sleeping anyway. The phone calls with Jackie got easier, but she didn't miss her any less. She didn't just miss her physically, she missed the way Jackie would talk to her like there was nobody else she'd rather be with. Shauna spent the summer being looked at and wanted and needed and now it was just… not that. She felt the rejection every day, and no amount of working out or journaling was fixing it.

Shauna was trying to use her insomnia to her advantage, getting ahead in classes, meal prepping, whatever it took. She was getting ahead on some homework when the phone rang. It was 4 am, so Shauna knew it had to have been Jackie.

She picked up the phone, "Jackie?" Why would she be awake right now? It was late even for her.

"Hey, Shipman. Sorry, did I wake you?"

"No, no. I was just finishing up a writing assignment. I'm glad you called, you've got some good timing, Jax."

"Oh yeah? What are you writing about?"

"Just something for class, a Dickinson analysis."

"Right… right. Whatever that is." Shauna couldn't help but smile. She was cute.

"It's poetry. You really should read it, honestly. I know it isn't your thing, but I think you'd like it."

"Hmm… maybe I will." Shauna knew she wouldn't, but the thought was nice.

"What were you up to tonight? Renee working?" In other words: What is she doing awake at 4 am and was she just now getting home? The bars close at 3.

"Yeah, she was. It was busy tonight, typical Friday I guess but there were a lot of people I don't usually see there. It was kind of weird."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Shauna said. She didn't love the idea of new people around Jackie, but she quickly let that go.

“No, it was probably good, I guess. For the bar, I mean. Re got good tips, too.” Shauna laughed. What the fuck was she even saying?

“I’m surprised you don’t just get a job there, honestly. You’re there all the time.”

“I’d need a valid 21 year old ID for that job, I think.”

“Oh, right. I forgot you’ve been breaking the law every day for the past year.”

“Oh, whatever Shipman. Like you don’t also have a fake.” Shauna laughed into the phone. It felt good to joke back and forth with her like nothing had ever gone wrong between them. It was comfortable.

“I don’t use it nearly as much as you do.”

“Okay, fair fair.” Jackie conceded.

“Any reason for this late night call? Did something happen?” Shauna asked. Again: who was she with and why was she getting home at 4. Had she been sleeping with somebody else? The vibe was weird. Something was up. She could just feel it.

“No, no. I’m okay. I just missed you I guess.” Jackie stuttered over her words in a way that felt kind of terrifying to Shauna. What was she so nervous about? Would it be wrong to just ask if she had fucked somebody? Probably.

Shauna sighed into the phone. “I miss you too.” The line went quiet. It was heavy. Shauna could feel the weight of it. Jackie faked a yawn and Shauna took the hint. “You should go to bed. I know you can sleep in tomorrow or whatever, but it’s pretty early.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. Goodnight, Shipman.”

“Goodnight, Jax. Thanks for calling.”

“Thanks for picking up.” Shauna let out a short breath, not quite a laugh but not quite a sigh and Jackie hung up the phone. Shauna set down her homework and opened her journal.

This is actually the fucking worst thing that has ever happened to me. Is she fucking somebody else? Who gets home from the bar at 4 am? Even Nat is home before then. Fuck.

There wasn’t much more to say. Shauna decided to just take a melatonin and pass out. She really didn’t want anything to do with this thought of Jackie in somebody else’s bed. She felt herself spinning out, and thankfully, the pill took over her before the panic did and sent her into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Chapter 32

The next day, Shauna obsessed over whether or not to go out to the bar. Nat had to work and Lottie had plans with some friends from class, so she would be completely by herself. What if she didn't like the lacrosse girls? What if she freaked out? Yeah, she could probably just walk next door to hang out with Nat, but still. It just didn't seem very appealing. She was leaning towards just reading and doing homework. That seemed like the safer option. And what if this was all just some fucked up test by Jackie to see if she'd fuck somebody? It seemed absurd, but maybe it was true. It wasn't like she wanted anybody else anyway. All she wanted was Jackie. She was thinking about it when the phone rang. She answered it absentmindedly and forgot to say anything until she heard Jackie's laugh.

"Shauna?"

She dropped the pen from her mouth and sat up straight, "Oh, Jax. Hey, sorry." She stuttered like an idiot.

"No, you're good. You reading?" Shauna smiled. Of course she'd be able to tell.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm good though. I can talk."

"Dickinson again?" Shauna was beaming now.

"Yeah, actually. You remembered?"

"Of course I did. I grabbed a copy at the library actually." Shauna's jaw dropped and her chest felt way too warm to be talking about grabbing a book at the library.

"Wow… I'm touched actually, Jax. That's so sweet."

"You should be," Jackie joked, "I don't think I've ever been in a library before."

Shauna laughed. "So… what did you think of it?"

"Oh, no. I haven't actually read it yet, but it is sitting right here on my desk, just in case." That made a lot more sense actually.

"Oh, my god," Shauna laughed into the phone and leaned back in her chair. She made the right choice about the bar. She didn't need it. She needed to make sure Jackie didn't get hurt. Here she was taking the time to do something thoughtful and Shauna was considering meeting someone new. She felt guilty about it already. "That poor book is never going to see that library again."

"It's living a very glamorous life over here, actually. No greasy grimy hands pulling at the pages. Really, the book should be more appreciative."

"Whatever you say, babe. What have you been up to?" The babe slipped out, and Shauna hoped Jackie wouldn't notice it.

"I was just doing some homework. Re ran out for some pizza, I thought I'd see how your night was going."

“I’m just doing pretty much the same thing I’m always doing,” Shauna laughed. “I’m surprised you guys are staying in.” It was still early but they usually get there at like 9.

“Yeah, Re said she didn’t feel like going out, but she’s lying honestly.”

“Why would she lie about that?”

Jackie hesitated and Shauna started to panic. She didn’t know why but something felt wrong. “Oh… well, um. I think she’s scared that somebody will give her their number. We kind of have this deal.”

Shauna took her time before responding to that to really gather herself. Don’t freak out too soon. “So… what’s the deal?”

“Well this girl gave me her number, and Renee wants me to call, but I said I’d only do it when she did.” Someone had given Jackie their number. She was gonna call. I mean, she wouldn’t have made the fucking deal if she didn’t want to call. Shauna cleared her throat, trying to find a way to be fucking okay with this. She wasn’t. She couldn’t be. She heard Jackie’s breathing on the line, but she just couldn’t think of what to say. “Shauna?”

“Yeah, sorry. I’m here.” It was pretty much all she could think of. She stared at the pictures of Jackie and her on her wall. Some from high school, some from the summer. Was this what her life was going to be? Sitting on the phone listening to Jackie talk about her dates while she did her fucking Dickinson analysis? Fuck.

They sat in silence for a while before Jackie sighed, “I’m sorry, I don’t even know why I mentioned it.” Shauna rubbed her eyes, trying not to be a complete dick.

It came out that way anyway, “No, Jax. You should call.” The tone wasn’t right. It wasn’t how it was supposed to sound. Fuck. She took a deep breath and tried again, “Seriously, I’m your friend. I want you to talk to me. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t call her.” It hurt worse than she thought it would. Her whole body sunk into her desk chair, reacting to that fucking horrible advice she just gave.

Jackie inhaled with what sounded like shock and they sat in even more silence. Shauna couldn’t take this. It was too much. “Shauna—” It was clear she had nothing to really say. She was gonna call. Shauna knew she was gonna call. Fuck it.

“I um… I actually have to go. I think Lottie and Nat just got back from dinner.” They didn’t. They weren’t even at dinner, but Shauna couldn’t be on the phone any longer. She felt like she was going to start fucking crying.

“Yeah, yeah. Sorry I didn’t mean to keep you.”

“No problem. Bye, Jax.” Shauna hung up the phone and slammed her head down on her desk. What a fucking joke. Her whole life just had to be some ridiculous fucking joke. She gave up on her assignment and walked out to the kitchen, grabbing a half empty bottle of rum and downing three shots. Fuck it. She was going to this bar. She didn’t fucking care. Jackie didn’t care about any of it. She was going on dates, moving on whatever the fuck it was. She had been trying this whole goddamn time. Why couldn’t Shauna do the same?

She brought her bottle into the shower with her, which she realized was insane, but she didn’t fucking care. She wanted to be drunk. She wanted to be very, very drunk. She got

dressed in her bedroom, choosing a pair of black, baggy jeans and a white short sleeve band tee. She straightened her hair and did probably a little too much eye makeup before slamming the rest of the bottle and walking out the door. She was early, so she went to Nat's first. She plopped down on her usual bar stool and Nat raised her eyebrows as she walked towards her.

"What's happening here?"

"Jackie is going on a date. So I am taking Ava up on her night out with the lacrosse girls."

"She's going on a date? Just like that?" Nat asked. She seemed shocked, and Shauna was too, honestly. She thought what they had meant something. She had been so convinced of it, but she was wrong. It took two weeks for Jackie to get some girl's number? Fuck that. Shauna had spent the past year completely isolated, trying to do everything right to not potentially hurt her feelings. It was clear Jackie didn't think any of it was a big deal, so why should Shauna waste her time anymore?

"Yes. Her and Renee turned it into a fucking game, actually."

"You're drunk."

Shauna nodded once, "Very. Rum and coke please."

Nat shrugged and poured it for her. "You look good. What's your plan for the night?"

"Thank you." Shauna took a long drink and cleared her throat. What was her plan? "It sounded like Ava maybe had someone in mind, so I don't know. Maybe I'll like, talk to them or something."

Nat laughed, "Okay well I'll be here if you need me. Stop by before you head home please." Shauna finished her drink and nodded as she walked out the door and over to the club. Ava spotted her at the door and waved her over. She was with a pretty redhead.

"Shauna! This is my girlfriend, Reese." They said hi and Shauna introduced herself. She was nice. She was social. It felt good for someone to be waiting for her and excited to see her. She felt good. Ava pointed to her group of teammates on the dancefloor, and Shauna's eyes landed on one girl in particular. She had soft blonde curls and big, bright, hazel eyes. She was taller than Jackie, and a little thicker, but it was… kind of insane, actually. Ava pointed at another girl in the group. She was tall and had dark brown curls with pretty green eyes.

"That's Morgan. You are like… exactly her type." Shauna nodded, glancing back at the other girl for a moment before refocusing on Morgan. She wasn't gonna be a dick. Maybe this girl would do something for her. Ava waved her over and she made the introductions. Shauna sat down next to her at the bar and they talked for a while. She was nice and flirty and all the things, but her eyes just kept ending up on the other girl. Morgan called her on it.

"Wow you are like infatuated, huh?" Shauna's head snapped back to Morgan. She felt like shit, but the other girl just seemed kind of amused.

"No, I'm sorry. Fuck, I didn't mean to be an asshole, she just looks like somebody I know."

"No, really don't worry about it. I just… she's not exactly the relationship type." Shauna looked at her. She didn't care even a little bit. "I don't know exactly what you're looking for here, but I just wanted to give you a heads up."

Shauna nodded. "Yeah. Thank you."

"The someone you know… an ex?"

Shauna laughed, "Who the fuck knows, actually." Morgan laughed.

"We all have one." She pointed out another girl in the crowd, she had tight blonde curls and dark brown eyes. "That's mine, and now we have to coexist on the field together." Yikes. At least Shauna had ruined her life after Nationals.

"That sounds fucking awful, actually." Morgan laughed and her eyes ended up over Shauna's shoulder.

"Jackson!" Shauna turned and saw the Jackie look alike walking their way. Morgan continued, "Jackson, this is Shauna, Shauna this is Jackson."

Jackson smiled and let her eyes wander Shauna's body. There was something there. She turned to Morgan and rolled her eyes, then turned back to Shauna. "It's Taylor, actually. Sorry, they all know me by my last name." She extended her hand and Shauna took it. Her name was Taylor Jackson? Seriously?

"Shauna Shipman. Nice to meet you." She smiled and found herself completely wrapped up in her eyes. They looked so similar to Jackie's. This was a sign of some sort. It had to mean something. "Can I please buy you a shot?"

Morgan stood up and offered Taylor her seat, which she took without hesitation. "Tequila, please."

Shauna ordered two shots of tequila and two shots of rum for them to take together. Shauna struggled with the last one, her body probably actively rejecting any more alcohol in her system. A drop ran down her chin and Taylor smiled, reaching out with her thumb to wipe it away. It didn't take long for them to end up on the dance floor. Taylor had her hands wrapped around Shauna's neck from behind and she was grinding her ass into her thighs. Shauna was so drunk that she could almost pretend it was Jackie. They looked so similar, and from behind she could barely tell it was a different person. She grabbed her hips and worked her hands around her waist, leaning forward to kiss her neck. She heard her gasp and felt her reach around to hold Shauna's head in place. Shauna took the invitation to kiss a little harder, sucking and biting on her skin. Taylor turned around and kissed her. Shauna closed her eyes and pretended. She pretended that her lipstick tasted like strawberries. She pretended that her perfume smelled like vanilla. She pushed her tongue into the other girl's mouth and heard a little moan slip out. She couldn't tell if it was hers or Taylors and she honestly didn't really care. Taylor grabbed at her hips and pulled her closer, breathing heavy into her mouth before leaning down to kiss up her neck.

"I want you to touch me," Taylor whispered in her ear. Shauna moaned and the girl grabbed her hand, pulling her to the club handicap bathroom. Saying no to her felt pretty much just as difficult as saying no to Jackie. Shauna just couldn't. It felt like a sign, right? Taylor pulled her in and shut and locked the door behind her. She pushed Shauna up against

the bathroom door and pulled at her shirt. Shauna felt her hands grab at her tits and she lost it. She turned them around, grabbing Taylor by the ass and kissing her harder and rougher. Taylor moaned and grabbed Shauna's hand, moving it under her skirt instead of over and onto the bare skin of her ass. Shauna moaned and Taylor worked to unbutton her jeans, reaching down at her zipper and pushing her hand into Shauna's pants the second she got them undone.

"Is this okay? I want to make you feel good, baby." Shauna nodded enthusiastically at the thought of Jackie wanting her again. Of course that was okay. Taylor pushed her fingers down into Shauna's pants and rubbed gently at her clit. 'You are so hot, Shauna. Fuck.' Shauna looked up at her and moaned. She was looking at her like she fucking *needed* her to get off. Shauna grabbed her face and kissed her, kicking her jeans onto the nasty, dirty floor and letting Taylor push her fingers inside of her. She leaned into her chest, kissing at her exposed skin and let this girl fuck her. It took longer than it would have with Jackie. Taylor didn't know her body the way that Jackie did. She wasn't bad. She definitely wasn't bad, but she still wasn't Jackie. Shauna pushed the thought out of her head and focused on cumming. She closed her eyes and saw Jackie's body on hers. She saw her abs and her perky, beautiful tits and her thighs and her ass. "I want you to cum, baby. Cum for me." Shauna wasn't sure if she had imagined Jackie saying it or if Taylor had, but regardless she felt herself come undone on her fingers, moaning and shaking. "Oh, fuck Jax." She realized what she said a little too late, but Taylor didn't question it. If everybody called her Jackson, it was probably her nickname too.

She pulled her hands around to the front of Taylor's skirt and pulled her thong to the side. She was fucking soaked. "Holy shit." Taylor moaned and gripped at her bicep.

"Please." That was all it took for Shauna to push two fingers inside of her. Taylor moaned and wrapped her leg around Shauna's hips. She grabbed her underneath her ass and picked her up, transferring her weight to the bathroom door and holding her in place so that Shauna to really fuck her. Taylor screamed, 'Oh my fucking god.' Shauna smiled and pushed her fingers in and out, as deep as she could go. Taylor's eyes rolled back in her head, "You are so fucking hot. Oh god, oh god, oh god." Shauna closed her eyes, picturing Jackie's face and Jackie's body. She heard Jackie's moans and Jackie's pants. Turns out, that was the only way she could actually enjoy this.

Shauna curled her fingers up and she felt two hands wrap themselves in her hair. "You look so pretty, Jax. Does that feel good?"

Taylor moaned and nodded. "So— so good. Yeah." Shauna moaned and fucked her harder, thrusting into her over and over again until she shook in Shauna's arms. Shauna opened her eyes and realized what the fuck just happened. She set her back down and walked to the sink to wash her hands. "You are so… strong. Holy shit." Shauna smiled awkwardly at Taylor in the mirror and walked out of the bathroom. She needed to leave. She was such a piece of shit, genuinely. She walked outside and sat down on the curb, trying not to cry. She knew she hadn't really done anything wrong, but it still just wasn't Jackie. It wasn't as good. It didn't feel right, and now she hated herself for it. She stood up and walked into Nat's bar. Nat saw her and set a water down in front of an empty stool.

"How was your night?" Shauna glared at her. Did it look like she was doing well? Nat laughed, "Meet anybody?"

Shauna sighed, “Actually I just fucked a girl in the bathroom.” Nat’s jaw dropped and she laughed.

“Bullshit.” Shauna raised her eyebrows and then dropped them, drinking half her water. Nat covered her mouth with her hand. “What the fuck? How the fuck did that happen?”

Shauna laughed and held her face in her hands. “Probably downing a fucking bottle of rum is how it happened.” Shauna’s words were slurred, and she didn’t realize until then *just* how fucked up she was. “I walked in and Ava wanted to set me up with someone, but there was this girl… loose blonde curls, 5’6ish, second most beautiful hazel eyes I’ve ever seen.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Nat asked, still looking insanely shocked.

“Her name was fucking Taylor Jackson.”

Nat gasped, “Shut up.” Shauna sighed.

“I’m such a fucking dickhead, Nat. What is wrong with me?”

“What do you mean? Why are you a dickhead?”

“I’m gonna get pissed off about Jackie going on a date and then go fuck her lookalike at the bar? I called the girl fucking Jax, for fuck’s sake.”

Nat laughed and refilled her water, “I mean maybe you’re a dickhead to that poor Taylor girl who had no idea you were moaning somebody else’s name, but what she doesn’t know won’t hurt her I’m sure.” Shauna sighed and Nat grinned at her and continued, “What, are you supposed to just never have sex again? If you guys are seriously trying to be friends then really you’re doing what she asked you to. You’re trying to move on.”

Shauna thought about it. It definitely wasn’t that simple. Jackie would definitely not see it that way. “I don’t want to move on.”

Nat sighed, “You’ve done everything you can, Shauna. She told you to fuck off and you tried to stay patient and get her to talk to you, then she still told you to fuck off so you gave her space. Then she wanted to be around you but told you she just wanted to be friends, you called bullshit and were right, and then she said she wanted to be friends again. Now you’re actually trying to do that. I don’t see anything wrong with having sex with somebody.” Shauna took a deep breath and looked away. She saw a problem with that. “She has been trying to move on for a fucking year. You deserve to try. At this point, you’ve given her a year of fucking patience and celibacy and it still didn’t work out. You’re entitled to fuck whoever you want to as far as I’m concerned.”

Shauna looked up at her. She kind of had a point. She had given Jackie a year to try to figure it out and she couldn’t. She had made out with Renee, now she’s going on dates. She never hesitated and thought to give Shauna time to figure her shit out. Maybe it was just never going to happen for her. Shauna couldn’t just never feel connected to anybody again. She couldn’t do it. “Maybe.”

Nat smiled at her, “I get off in 30 minutes. Wait for me and I’ll walk you home.” Shauna nodded, heading to the bathroom to try to sober herself up. She felt like a piece of shit. What if Jackie just takes this as a sign to cut her off completely? What if this is what does it? What if she realizes that every fear she’s ever had about Shauna at college just happened and she

can't handle still speaking to her. She broke down, crying and hyperventilating in the bathroom. She couldn't lose her. Had she just thrown it all away? Fuck. FUCK. She felt all the liquor she had ingested coming back up and leaned over the toilet, letting it all pour out of her. She had never thrown up like this before. She had never been this fucking drunk before. She threw up again and then cried again, before finally taking a couple deep breaths and managing to calm herself down. She rinsed her makeup off in the sink and walked back out to the bar. Nat saw her and went to clock out. They walked back in silence until they got to their front door.

"I'm not gonna tell you to not tell Lot, but just… Jackie can't know, okay? I'll tell her eventually. Just… not now." Nat nodded and extended her pinky, which Shauna took with a sigh of relief. What a fucking mess.

She immediately got in the shower, turning the heat up all the way and feeling her skin burn. She felt fucking evil. She had fucking hurt Jackie again, and it had been TWO FUCKING WEEKS. Maybe Jackie had reason to trust her. Maybe she had a fucking point. Shauna let her mind circle through every bad thought she could conjure up until the water ran cold. She stood up and wrapped herself in a towel. She walked to her bedroom in a daze and put on Jackie's striped button up. It smelled like her. Not like Taylor. She sighed and pulled the covers up, letting the comfort of the shirt coax her to sleep.

Chapter 33

Shauna couldn't tell Jackie. Sure, it was probably the right thing to do, but she was so fucking terrified that Jackie would use it to prove some theory that Shauna couldn't be faithful to her, like she hadn't been for the past year and a half. She just carried on as usual, working out, going to class, journaling, doing homework and calling Jackie. The fact that she had been on a date didn't sting any less, but they hadn't talked about it so Shauna had no reason to be bitter. Jackie had carried on like she hadn't, so Shauna decided that Jackie probably didn't even want to know about her night at the bar.

Lauren from class invited her out for drinks with the group after a late night study session, and Shauna hesitated, but ended up agreeing. She could always use a drink, really. They walked into Nat's bar that had been hosting a live band that night. It was definitely out of the ordinary, and was a much different setting than any of them had been expecting, not that it stopped them. Lauren and Matt found someone in the crowd that they knew and ran off to chat, leaving Shauna and Adam alone at the bar.

"Is your friend working tonight?" Adam asked, looking around to find her.

Shauna shook her head, "No, she's got the night off. She's at home."

Adam nodded and raised an eyebrow at her, "Are you guys… you know?" Shauna choked on her drink. Fuck, no.

"Oh, god. No. Definitely not. She's my best friend and roommate. That's all." Adam laughed and threw his hands up.

"Had to ask, had to ask." Shauna shook her head and took another sip of her drink. "Does that mean I've got a shot?" He asked. Shauna sighed and looked away. She didn't want to be mean. He actually made an effort to talk to her even when she's been a bitch. She was honestly starting to think of him as a friend.

"Oh, I don't know." Adam smiled at her.

"I can't quite figure you out, Shaun." Shauna flinched at the nickname. She had always fucking hated it.

"Shaun? Seriously?" Adam threw his head back and face palmed.

"Oh god I really ruined my chances now, huh?"

Shauna nodded with a laugh, "Oh, definitely." He chuckled. Shauna thought about it, he was just so… not Jackie-like. He couldn't have been more her opposite, actually. He was a dark haired man, who liked to read and write poetry and make art, and who also was actually showing interest in her.

"Seriously, what can I do to get you to let me buy you dinner? I'll be a gentleman, I swear." Shauna squinted at him, trying to figure out how she felt about it. It felt fun to flirt a little. It felt good to be wanted by someone. It felt a little terrifying to ruin what kind of felt

like a friendship. Adam widened his eyes and put his palms together like he was praying. "Please?" Shauna laughed at the overexaggerated puppy dog eyes and pushed his hands down.

"Just… let me think about it."

Adam smiled, "That's not a no." Shauna laughed. He was not easily deterred, that's for sure.

"It's not a yes."

"I'll take it," he said, waving over the bartender and ordering another drink. "We're celebrating," he told him with a wink in Shauna's direction. It was ridiculous, actually but it made her laugh. He was this excited about the potential that Shauna could say yes to a first date? Shauna shook her head, accepting her drink with a thank you and going about her night. Adam didn't bring it up again and Shauna had to admit she had a lot of fun, actually. They joked and laughed and honestly completely blew off Lauren and Matt. Shauna didn't even remember seeing them again. Adam insisted he walk Shauna the half a block home and dropped her at the door. It was kind of sweet, in a pointless, dumb, kind of stalkery way. When she got through the door, Nat was waiting up on the couch.

"Fuck any more Jackie clones?" Shauna laughed.

"God, no. Jesus, Nat!" Nat laughed and Shauna sat down next to her on the couch.

"You were out late." Shauna looked over at her and squinted.

"And what, you sat here waiting up so that you could get all the hot gossip?"

Nat gasped, pretending to be insulted, "Maybe I just couldn't sleep, or maybe I was just concerned about your well being and wanted to make sure you actually made it home. God forbid I try to be a friend…" Shauna raised her eyebrows and Nat folded, "Or maybe I was curious what you were up to so late at night."

Shauna laughed, "We just grabbed some drinks after the study thing."

Nat raised an eyebrow, "'We' being…"

"Matt, Lauren, Adam and I." Shauna paused, debating if running it by Nat was a bad idea. She knew she was just gonna tell her to go on the date. "Is Lottie here, actually?"

"Yeah, she's just doing a lab report or something. Why?"

"I need her advice." Shauna stood up and walked over to their bedroom, knocking on the door before entering. Nat laughed.

"Well just fuck me, I guess." She walked in behind Shauna and sat on the bed next to Lottie.

"What's up, Shauna? You okay?"

"I was actually hoping you could help me figure something out. Do you have a second?"

Lottie shifted to make room for Shauna on their bed. Nat huffed, "Yeah apparently I don't give good enough advice."

"I'm not saying that, but you're biased." Lottie laughed and nodded for Shauna to continue.

"Adam asked me out, or I guess asked me what he needed to do to get me to go on a date, and I don't really know how to feel about it."

"Well, do you like him?" Lottie asked.

Shauna sighed and rubbed her eyes, "That's the thing… I thought I hated him, actually. But really he's nice and flirty and I don't know… it's not hard. It's not painful. It's not like life altering or all consuming either, but I don't feel sick to my stomach about it." Lottie nodded.

"So what's the hesitation, then?"

Shauna didn't really want to answer. She knew it was pathetic. She knew saying Jackie at this point was kind of ridiculous. Nat shook her head and answered for her, "He's the opposite of Jackie." Shauna sighed.

"I know she's going on dates or whatever, but it feels different when I do it. I'm scared that she's gonna figure it out and want me back and then find out I slept with someone or dated someone and get scared and bail. She told me she couldn't be with me because she'd be too worried I'd be cheating on her and now it feels like that's what this would be."

Lottie's eyebrows creased, "Didn't she tell you she wasn't sure if a relationship would ever be possible?" Shauna's heart stopped. Had Jackie told her that? Did Jackie tell her it was never going to happen?

"Did Jackie say that?" Shauna asked. Lottie laughed.

"Nat told me that's what you said."

"Oh. Okay." Lottie laughed.

"Aren't you guys trying to move on? Dates feel like a much more productive way to do that than sitting by the phone like a lost puppy."

"Okay, well what if I'm just an asshole to him? I mean… I don't think I could ever care about anyone the way I care about Jackie. Is it cruel to lead him on?"

"How do you even know you won't care about him the way you care about Jackie?" Shauna was kind of at a loss for words. She just did. She shook her head, unsure of what to say and Nat cut her off with a groan.

"She wants you to be friends, which means she wants you to move on. If she has a problem with that then that's on her. You did every fucking thing she asked or didn't ask of you for like a year and a half. Maybe you just need to listen to her. She's saying you're just friends so you're allowed to act like it."

Shauna looked back at Lottie for her thoughts and she just shrugged. "Yeah. Pretty much."

"You don't think Jackie would be upset?"

"Of course she's gonna be upset. She loves you." Shauna felt herself getting angry. If Jackie loved her then why did they have to do this shit?

"I would never tell her I just wanted to be friends."

Lottie sighed, "You guys have different shit going on. Didn't you agree to this? Maybe you should've just gone no contact. You can't live your life worried about what relationships your friend might feel anxious about." Nat laughed.

"I told her she should've told Jackie to just go fuck herself." Lottie and Shauna both sent Nat a glare and she laughed again.

"It's a complicated situation, Nat. It's okay to love them both." Nat rolled her eyes.

"I don't. She's been leading Shauna on for months now. She's hurt her like over and over again, and now she's the reason she's refusing to even try to move on. Actually, she doesn't even have to try. She's actively turning away from it." Lottie tilted her head and gave Nat a look and she looked at Shauna defiantly.

"Please just go on the date. You don't have to do anything. You wouldn't be doing anything wrong. Just *see* if you can like somebody. You owe yourself that before you just dedicate your whole fucking life to her."

Shauna nodded, groaning into her hands. She knew they were right. She also knew it was going to hurt Jackie. This fucking sucked. "Okay, okay. I'll talk to him tomorrow." Lottie smiled softly and Nat sighed happily.

"Thank god." Shauna laughed and pushed her off the bed. She hit the ground with a thud and sprung back up again, "You need to go for a run or something. Violence isn't the answer." Lottie laughed and Shauna rolled her eyes, stood up and walked to the shower. She needed to not feel fucking disgusting and while she knew a shower wouldn't solve the problem, it would probably help.

The next day, she skipped her first class to work out a little longer. She didn't have Adam in that class, so it didn't feel like procrastination even though she knew it was. Shauna showered, threw a pair of shorts and a crew neck on and made her way to class. She tried to pump herself up, thinking about how Jackie was going on dates, and how Jackie had been going out of her way to try to get over her. She figured that Jackie had essentially begged her to be just friends, and letting this guy buy her dinner was part of that. Maybe that's just what Jackie deserved for turning Shauna down. Maybe it's what she asked for.

She walked in and Adam's eyes lit up. He smiled and waved her over, pulling out the chair next to him. Shauna took it. "Thank you."

"How many pages have you written so far?" Shauna laughed.

"Of which draft?" She had been combing over her own short stories obsessively, trying to get them right.

Adam laughed, "Jesus Christ. I should've known, actually. Here I am just trying to piece a couple sentences together."

Shauna smiled. It felt good to be better than him. "So, I've been thinking about your offer…" Adam turned and nodded.

"And?" He was damn near giddy. It was a little cute, Shauna guessed.

"I think I'm down. But, we're not dating. It's dinner." Adam nodded.

"Deal. I will pick you up at 6:30 tonight." Shauna forced a smile, trying to convince herself she felt good about it. The professor turned the lights off and turned the projector on, starting the lecture. As soon as it was over, Shauna booked it out of class. She was finding it a little hard to stomach the fact that she was gonna let somebody else take her out. She dropped her bag off in her room and ran to the gym. She needed to refocus. When she felt like her body couldn't move any more, she ran home. She got in the shower, looked at the time and then just sat at her desk in her towel. She had two hours. What was this gonna be? He was rich, and Shauna was kind of worried he was gonna take her somewhere nice and jeans and a shirt wouldn't cut it. She sighed and went back to her closet, picking out a pair of black dress pants and a green sweater. She put her hair up and put some mascara on. She felt good. She looked good. She walked back into her room and a step through the door the phone started to ring. Shauna knew it was Jackie. How the fuck did she know? She panicked, walking slowly over to the phone. She thought about just letting it ring, but it was Jackie. She couldn't not answer.

"Hello, this is Shauna." She was hesitant to even let the conversation go any further. Maybe she should just hang up. It really wasn't helping with the pre-date guilt.

"Shauna!" Jackie sounded so excited, so enthusiastic. Did she even know how much Shauna had been hurting? "Hey, it's Jackie." Shauna took a deep breath. Her stomach was turning and she genuinely thought she was going to be sick.

"Oh." Jesus Christ what was she saying? "Hi, Jackie. What's up? Did you need something?"

She heard Jackie's exhale and her heart broke. She was being short. She knew she was, but she just couldn't fake it right now. She couldn't. "Um— no I didn't need anything. I was just saying hi."

"Oh, okay…" What was she supposed to fucking say? "Well, hi!" Shauna scoffed at her own idiocy.

"Are you okay?"

How was she gonna lie? She needed to get off the phone. "Yeah, I'm good. I actually have to go. I'm kind of behind schedule."

"Oh, okay. What are you late for?" Shauna pinned the phone to her chest and sighed, getting frustrated with the amount of fucking questions she was asking.

"Just grabbing dinner. Maybe I can call later?" She just needed to get off the phone. If she had to hear Jackie's heart break when she told her about the date she knew she'd never go.

"Like just going to pick it up? You know you can call anytime."

Shauna ignored the question, "Okay, cool. I'll try to call later then, okay?"

Jackie's sadness managed to make its way through the phone. "Yeah… sure." She knew something was up. Yet again, Shauna had made sure to fucking hurt her. She hung up the

phone and sighed, glancing again at the clock. It was 6:15. She went to the kitchen and took a shot, needing something to fucking stabalize her. Shauna took a deep breath, walking over to the window to see when he got there. She watched a fucking Porsche pull over and put its hazards on and laughed to herself.

"Is he fucking serious?" she asked herself under her breath. A Porsche was crazy. She walked down the stairs and up to his car. He got out and opened the door for her. "Oh, wow," Shauna said. It was a little much, but she was trying to just enjoy it.

"I promised to be a gentleman, didn't I?" Shauna raised her eyebrows and he shut the door behind her, walking over to the driver's seat. He drummed along to Sugar Ray's "Fly" and Shauna stifled a laugh. He caught it and she started laughing harder.

"I'm sorry, honestly. Just… Sugar Ray, seriously?"

Adam laughed, "What? Is it too happy for you? Would you rather I turned on some angsty shit instead?"

"Maybe it is." Adam reached for the radio and Shauna batted his hand away, "No, it's fine. Listen to your poppy shit. I can be happy for a night." Adam smiled and focused back on the road.

They pulled up to some fancy, Italian restaurant that Shauna didn't even know existed. It had tall ceilings and candlelit tables. Shauna was uncomfortable. She had only been to a restaurant like this once with Jackie's family, and she didn't really like it then, either. They sat down and Adam smiled at her and ordered two glasses of wine. Shauna took down a big drink of it and sighed, looking down at the menu. They didn't sell anything less than $15. Adam cleared his throat. "You okay?"

Shauna nodded. "Yeah, yeah. I'm good." Adam laughed.

"You're full of shit." Shauna smiled at him. "What's up?"

"I've just never really been somewhere they don't serve french fries." Adam bowed his head.

"It's too much." Shauna's guilt started to bubble up again.

"No, no. It's fine, really. It's nice." Adam pulled out his wallet and threw a $20 bill on the table, which seemed a little absurd for two glasses of wine.

"I insist." Adam reached out his hand and Shauna took it. "Let's go get a burger, what do you think?" Shauna couldn't help but smile. He was actually paying attention to her and making an effort to do what she wanted to do. It was really sweet.

"A burger sounds great, actually." Adam led her back to the car and drove them to some nothing diner closer to campus. The burgers were fucking great, and she had a lot more fun when she was relaxed. They were joking and laughing and flirting. Shauna was actually kind of enjoying it.

Shauna moaned into her food as she chewed and Adam laughed. "I'm sorry about earlier." Shauna shook her head, wanting to stop him but not wanting to talk with food in her mouth. "I was nervous… I am nervous, actually."

Shauna smiled at him, “Please don’t apologize. I’m sorry I fucked up your plans.”

Adam shook his head, “I was doing too much. It was a lot.” He was making fun of himself, begging Shauna to indulge in it.

“Maybe a little, but I’m having fun. I appreciate you caring enough to change them.”

“Of course.” Adam smiled and it was genuine. He was kind of cute… in his own way. After dinner, Adam insisted on some milkshakes and something Shauna was learning about him was that he was fucking persistent. “So… was I as bad as you thought I’d be?”

Shauna laughed, “What makes you think I thought this was gonna be bad?”

“Well,” Adam sat up and chuckled, “Maybe the fact that you spent a year ignoring every advance I tried to make, or the very clear declaration that this was not a date. Got a few options there.”

Shauna laughed, “I’m not really into like… meeting people.”

“Oh, I’ve noticed.” Shauna smiled, taking another sip of her milkshake. “I am glad you let me take you out, though. I’ve had a lot of fun.”

“Me too, actually.” Adam had kind of surprised her. She wasn’t sold on him, and it felt nothing like her feelings for Jackie, but why couldn’t she have some fun? Would that really be so bad? Adam drove her home and Shauna hesitated in the passenger seat. Part of her really didn’t want the night to be over. Would it be so bad to invite him inside? Would it be too forward? She didn’t even know if she liked him, but she liked the way he made her feel. He made her feel wanted and chosen. He looked at her like he wanted to kiss her, and really what was stopping her? Jackie had wanted her to be single, right?

She laughed, “Would you um… do you want to come inside?” Adam looked her up and down and part of Shauna kind of regretted extending the invite, but again he *wanted* her and wasn’t scared to act on it. With Adam there were no rules. There were no invisible trip wires she had to try to navigate. It was allowed to just be easy.

“Yes. I would love to.” Adam parked the car and Shauna led him up the stairs, instructing him to be quiet until she had her bedroom door shut. He glanced around at her room and Shauna sat on the bed. Adam smiled and sat next to her. He looked at her eyes and then down at her lips, “You look so beautiful tonight.”

Shauna felt herself blush. “Thank you.” It came out as a whisper and Shauna watched him smile in response to it. He looked her up and down before leaning in. Shauna knew that it was going to happen, but she kind of panicked. She thought about just pussying out, but what had she brought him up here to do if not this? Shauna mentally just said fuck it and leaned in. It was… different. She wanted to like it. She really wanted to like it, but it was just kind of off. The passion she had with Jackie was just not there, and Shauna found herself really fucking missing it. She deepened the kiss, wanting it to just appear out of nowhere but it wasn’t working. Adam slipped his tongue in her mouth and grabbed her cheek with his hand. He let his other hand run up and down Shauna’s thigh, which again was too hesitant. Shauna climbed on top of him, straddling his legs and wrapping her arms around his neck. Adam moaned into her touch and Shauna pulled away.

"We're not dating. That's not what this is. Is that okay with you?" Adam nodded enthusiastically and for a second it reminded her of Jeff. She kind of hated it. He grabbed her hips and massaged them before moving down to kiss her neck. Shauna felt his hands move up under the fabric of her shirt and his tongue slide down to her collarbones and then her tits. He bunched her shirt up and pulled gently.

"Can I take this off?" Shauna nodded, just wanting to see how he felt. Maybe if she could like sex with someone so different than Jackie then it meant she could actually try to move on. Adam pulled her shirt over her head and fumbled at the clasp of her bra. Shauna laughed and undid it herself, letting her tits fall in front of his face. He looked mesmerized and immediately reached up to grab them. Shauna leaned her head back and just breathed in the feeling. It felt so good to be touched like this. Shauna pulled his shirt off and started to grind herself down into his lap. It wasn't long before she felt him start to ger hard through his pants. Shauna held eye contact as she reached down to unzip his pants. Adam picked her up and set her down on her back on the bed, pulling his pants down to his ankles. "Are you sure this is okay?"

"Stop asking questions. I want you to." Adam nodded and pulled his boxers down, revealing his semihard dick. He pumped it a few times in his hand and Shauna pulled her pants off while he got it the rest of the way there. Adam reached down and grabbed a condom out of his wallet, putting it on and then reaching back out for Shauna's hips. He moaned and the feeling of her skin and crawled on top of her, slowly lining himself up and then pushing into her. It filled her up in a hurry, and Shauna gasped at how full it actually felt. He spent the next 15 minutes pushing in and out of her. It wasn't like it was bad, but it wasn't… great? It definitely felt good, but it wasn't like she orgasmed either. He pulled out of her and came in the condom, which Shauna felt was pretty respectful. Shauna let him lay in bed for like 5 minutes before she suggested that maybe he should go home. He smiled at her, kissed her and then grabbed his stuff and went home. He was like a fucking puppy. Nothing ever seemed to really hurt his feelings. He left and Shauna got in the shower, needing to not feel so fucking disgusting before going to bed.

Shauna washed herself and then sat down, thinking through what she had just done. She thought about what she would do if Jackie had slept with two people by now. She had enough self awareness to know she would probably get fucking violent. It wasn't fair to be this angry when she was the one that fucking did it. All she could sit with was Jackie's imagined reaction to her finding it all out. Shauna could see her arms cross and her mouth fall open. She could see her eyebrows crease and her eyes well up with tears. It fucking broke her heart. Maybe it was necessary, maybe it wasn't. Either way it was sickening. Shauna ran out of the shower and threw up. She took a couple minutes to collect herself and brush her teeth. She needed to be a fucking adult. Jackie wanted to be friends, and this is what that looked like. Fuck. When walked out of the bathroom, Nat was walking through the front door. She jumped and Shauna laughed.

"What are you doing up? Please tell me you didn't run to the gym by yourself at 1 am."

"No, no. I actually went out with Adam tonight."

Nat raised her eyebrows and smirked, "Oh. I see."

Shauna sighed and walked over to the kitchen. "I may or may not have invited him upstairs. We may or may not have had sex."

Nat gasped, "Jesus, Shipman. After the first date?"

Shauna chuckled, "I've known him for like a year. We've hung out a bunch of times. I made sure he knew it didn't mean we were dating."

"So…" Nat pried.

"So…" Shauna teased.

"Did you like it?"

Shauna thought about it. "I'm not gonna say I didn't. It felt good, it just wasn't the same. I don't know. It was better than nothing, I guess." Nat nodded.

"Are you doing like… okay?"

"Um… I actually feel like shit, but I'm trying not to think about it. I know I don't have to feel bad for having sex. I know that. She wanted to be friends, so I'm here being her friend. It just fucking sucks. It really fucking sucks."

Nat nodded. "You're right. You shouldn't feel bad. You're a hot, smart, talented 19 year old. Hot, smart, talented 19 year olds have sex in college. It's okay. It's natural."

"I know that, but then I think about Jackie having sex and it feels like my brain is on fucking fire."

"I mean no offense but you signed up for it. You guys committed to being friends after spending the summer sneaking off to fuck and be all romantic or whatever. It's gonna hurt. It's gonna hurt on both sides. Really your options are talk to her or don't talk to her, not living your life is no longer an option. She gave that up." Shauna nodded. She knew she was right. It made a lot of sense, actually, but that didn't make it much better. She still felt sick.

"I think I'm gonna head to bed. I'll see you in the morning, yea?"

Nat smiled, "Yeah. Love you."

Shauna smiled as she walked back to her room, "Love you too. Thank you, Nat."

She collapsed onto her bed and took a deep breath. Sitting alone in the dark made her realize how truly frustrated she was. Adam had felt so good, but Shauna had never had sex where she didn't cum before. Jackie always made sure she came. It was like she craved it. Shauna looked back at the picture on her nightstand, reaching into her pajama pants and circling her clit. She let out a quiet moan and imagined Jackie's tongue instead of her fingers. She thought about her eyes staring up at her and her hair falling down on her thighs. It took seconds for her to cum. *Thinking* about Jackie for 30 seconds made her cum when Adam couldn't in 15 fucking minutes. She was so fucking screwed.

Chapter 34

Shauna spent the whole next day at the gym. She was kind of proud of herself, but she also fucking hated herself. She missed Jackie. She wanted to call her, but she couldn't. She'd pick up the phone and then just sit there. What was she gonna say? How could she just pretend that she hadn't done the worst thing imaginable. She slept with two people now and she went on a date with someone, and she had liked it. If she knew Jackie had done those things she'd be losing it. She *mentioned* a fucking date and Shauna wanted to fucking crash out. She didn't get home until dinner time, and Lottie was in the kitchen cooking.

"Is Nat working tonight?" Shauna asked.

"Yeah. She's not closing though." Shauna nodded and pulled a pack of ramen out of the cupboard. "Hey, no. I made enough. Eat with me." Shauna hesitated and then gave in, putting the pack back and sitting down on the counter. It had definitely gotten easier to accept gifts from Lottie, but it still wasn't automatic.

"Have you talked to her?" Shauna shook her head, looking down at her lap. What would she even say?

"Not yet. I'm gonna call, I just have to figure out what to say." Lottie nodded and set a plate down in front of her.

"I'm sorry, Shauna. I didn't mean to bring you guys back together and make things worse for both of you. I really just want you to be happy. Together or not, I just want you to be happy."

Shauna shook her head. Lottie didn't need to feel guilty about anything. Shauna would've came back regardless if Lottie was involved or not. "I know I'm a fucking mess, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I could have the best day imaginable and fighting with Jackie would end up being the highlight."

Lottie smiled, "That might be the craziest fucking thing I've ever heard."

Shauna laughed and took a bite of her dinner. It was good. Lottie had a talent. "It's true, though." Shauna sighed, "I just love her. I really love her, and it might be the most painful thing that could ever happen to me." Shauna laughed.

"I wish I could understand you guys. It's kind of… I don't know. Beautiful? In its own way."

"It's something." Shauna decided to change the subject, "This is really good, Lot. Thank you for thinking of me."

Lottie nodded, "No problem. I kind of had a feeling you hadn't eaten today."

"I had a protein bar this morning."

"Okay, well that's great but it's now… 8 pm. So, you need a meal. Like carbs and sugar and all that."

"Look at you with your sciencey jargon." Lottie laughed.

"You have a lot of misdirection going on, you know? Makes me think something's up." Shauna knew that she knew. She knew that Nat had told her, which was fine. It was honestly kind of preferred so that she didn't have to say it out loud.

"How do I tell her?"

"Just don't lie. That's all." Shauna nodded and finished her dinner before hitting the shower and settling down at her desk. She opened up her notebook and started editing her most recent version of her class submission, stopping every few sentences to glance at the phone, wondering if she should just call and smooth everything over. About an hour in, it rang. Fuck.

"Hello? This is Shauna."

"Hey. It's me." Obviously it was Jackie.

"Oh, hey Jackie. What's up?"

"I just wanted to check in. You never called last night." Fuck. Shauna had said she might call. She had said might, though. She didn't exactly say she was going to.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know I was supposed to."

"You just said you would, but it's not a big deal. I just figured I'd ask how your night was." Hmm. Well, it was good. Shauna felt good about saying that.

"Yeah, it was good. Thanks for asking." Jackie clicked her tongue, something that Shauna knew also meant she was irritated.

"Yeah, of course." Then it was silent. Awkward again. Very awkward.

"Shauna, did you go on a date last night?"

Shauna froze. All she could hear was Lottie's voice telling her not to lie. She couldn't avoid, she couldn't pretend. She just had to say it. "Yeah… I did."

"And that's why you didn't call?" Jackie sounded angry.

Shauna sighed, "I don't know, Jax."

"I mean… I kind of asked you yesterday, too. Why didn't you just tell me?"

"I don't know." Shauna went quiet. What was she supposed to say?

"I just don't get why you wouldn't just be honest about it. It's not a big deal, but I don't get why you'd lie." Not a big deal? Jackie didn't think it was a big deal? The whole summer must've really not meant anything to her then, because everything felt like a big fucking deal to Shauna.

"I didn't fucking lie, Jackie. It is a big deal. It's all a big fucking deal to me. I don't know what you want me to say." Shauna snapped, like really snapped at Jackie for the first time in a long time. Maybe even for the first time since they rekindled their… whatever their relationship was. There it was, there was the defensive, impulsive fucking Shauna she didn't think existed anymore. Fuck. Jackie was silent. Shauna smacked the palm of her hand into

her forehead, hoping the pressure would make her think of a way to fix this. “I’m sorry, Jax. It’s hard for me to talk about this stuff.”

“Okay. Sorry. We don’t have to talk about it then. I didn’t mean to upset you.” Jackie’s voice was flat and Shauna knew she had shut down. Fuck. She had been so scared of hurting her that she just fucking yelled at her. “Actually, I have to go. Sorry, like I said I just wanted to check in.” Jackie hung up the phone before Shauna could say anything to redeem herself, and Shauna slammed her head down on her desk. She just started to cry. She was so frustrated. Jackie had wanted this, knowing that Shauna was going to spiral. She knew that Shauna was going to lose it and she had to have known she’d get defensive. That’s all she really knew how to do. Jackie had been so irritated by the fact that Shauna was going on dates. What, like she wasn’t allowed? Shauna was just supposed to be fucking Jackie’s and Jackie could go do whatever she wanted? Was that really what she fucking wanted?

Shauna gave up. She took a melatonin pill and just put herself to bed, unable to spiral any longer.

The next morning, she got up, immediately felt like shit for yelling at Jackie and then tried to just run it out of her system. She went to the gym, spent more time tan was probably healthy there and then ran home to find Nat in the kitchen. “Morning.” Shauna nodded at her and opened the fridge to get some water.

“Morning. When did you get home last night?”

“Like 3:30. They ended up asking me to close, even though I wasn’t scheduled to,” she said with an eyeroll. Shauna nodded again, feeling completely distracted. “What are you up to today?”

“Well… class and then probably just homework. I might go work out again I don’t know.” Nat nodded slowly and Shauna beelined for the shower. She knew that Nat wanted to talk but she just couldn’t discuss her and Jackie’s argument. She was still pissed, both at herself and at the way Jackie had gotten angry with her for going on a date. Shauna wanted nothing more than to take Jackie out, but Jackie didn’t fucking want that. Shauna had waited and pined after her and given so much of herself to fixing her fuck up and it wasn’t enough! Jackie told her to fucking move on and now that she’s trying she’s the fucking villian.

Shauna sat by the phone, head in her hands and considered calling to apologize. She knew at a bare minimum she owed Jackie an apology for yelling at her, but she just couldn’t. How would the rest of the conversation go? Would Jackie be expecting her to feel guilty about going on a date? Obviously she did, but she didn’t feel like she had to necessarily address that.

Shauna got in the shower and closed her eyes, trying to get rid of her headache before it turned into a migraine. It didn’t work.

Shauna spent day two of no contact absolutely fucking miserable. She skipped her morning workout, waking up with absolutely no motivation and pretty much just rolled out of bed and walked to class. She ran into Adam, who she couldn’t manage to be nice to. He was so sweet and it was the first time they saw each other since their date and Shauna pretty much just put her head down and ignored him. She walked out of the door as soon as their

discussion ended and he ran to catch up with her in the hallway. “Hey, hey. I’m sorry did I do something wrong?” Shauna sighed, looking behind him instead of at him.

“No, I’m sorry. I know I’m being a dick. I did have fun, just a bad day.” Adam nodded and furrowed his eyebrows. He seemed genuinely concerned. He found a pair of chairs in the hallway and led Shauna to them, sitting her down.

“Did something happen?”

Shauna laughed a little. Yeah, but it wasn’t really something she could just tell Adam.

“My friend and I got in a fight.” Adam nodded. What was she supposed to say? ‘I’ve been in a will they won’t they thing with my best friend for years and we got in a fight over our date and several other things we haven’t yet worked through.’ Shauna would’ve loved to say she didn’t want to admit any of that primarily due to potentially hurting his feelings or scaring him away or any other like empathetic reason, but those things felt very small to her. Realistically, what she was concerned with was what if they hang out more and he’s weird about Jackie being around her. What if she ended up not able to have Jackie and then she couldn’t have Adam either because he knew she was way too into her best friend? As awful as it might’ve been for her mind to jump there, she was so terrified to have to change her very much not friendly relationship with Jackie potentially years down the line for this man she barely liked. She needed him to not see Jackie as competition, because really she wasn’t. It wouldn’t be a fight. Shauna would do whatever Jackie allowed her to, regardless what else was going on. If Jackie told her she wanted to try 5 years into a relationship with Adam, Shauna knew it wouldn’t even be a question in her head.

“Okay… your friend from the bar? Your roommate?”

Shauna shook her head, “No, it’s a friend from back home. She goes to Rutgers.” Adam hesitated and nodded his head. He looked like he was debating on prying.

“Can I ask what it was about?” Shauna looked down at her hands. She felt cornered with her own poor decision making, so needless to say, all sane and honest things to say went out the window and instead Shauna blurted out something far less significant.

“I slept with her boyfriend in high school.” Adam’s eyes went big and Shauna relaized that while that wasn’t as bad as her other options, to normal people it was still pretty bad. “Sorry. You probably think I’m awful.”

Adam shook his head and put a hand on her knee. “No, no. You were a kid. Everybody does stupid, mean shit in high school. It’s just part of it.”

Shauna smiled a little, “Everybody doesn’t do that mean shit to their best friend.” Adam looked like he was going to try to defend her again and Shauna held her hand up to stop him, shaking her head. She didn’t deserve his defense, especially when he had no fucking clue what he was talking about. “We’re just not over it yet.”

“I’m gonna be honest… I’m surprised you’re even trying. I mean, she lives what like four hours away? Respectfully, what’s the point.”

“We’re family. It’s just given.” Shauna stood up and waited for Adam to do the same. She didn’t want to be rude, but she was done talking about this. He stood up and hesitated.

"Can I give you a hug? Would that help?"

Shauna again, didn't want to be rude but no. That would not help. "I think maybe I just need a day. Is that okay? Maybe we can meet up at the bar tomorrow night? Nat's working." Adam nodded and smiled, seemingly unaware of the fact that she had just turned him down.

When she got home, she layed down dramatically on the couch in front of Nat, who was watching some shitty old movie from the 60s. "Oh?" She questioned.

"Yeah."

Nat laughed, "What's wrong with you?"

"Well… I just told Adam that me and Jackie were fighting because I slept with Jeff and we couldn't get over it."

Nat tilted her head to the side, "I mean… it's definitely missing some key details but essentially, yeah."

Shauna groaned, "Can I tell you something like truly fucked up without you deciding I'm fucking awful and never speaking to me again?"

Nat laughed, "I'm gonna be so honest I really don't think there's much you could tell me to make me hate you right now. Hit me with it."

Shauna smiled, "I didn't want to tell him about Jackie in case we ended up dating and he tried to set boundaries." Nat sucked her lips in and let out a slow exhale, actively stopping herself from laughing.

"Wow, Shipman. You lied in advance on the off chance you date this man and want to cheat on him with Jackie?" Shauna buried her face in the pillows and groaned. Yeah, she was awful.

"I know. It's so bad. It's so, so bad."

"It's… not great. Maybe just don't date him? I don't think you need to come out to anybody you don't want to, but you definitely should not tell that man you'll ever be exclusive." Shauna laughed.

"Yeah I'm not planning on it."

"So you and Jackie are fighting because…" Nat raised her eyebrows and Shauna looked up at her, realizing she had never actually told her they were fighting.

"Oh shit. Sorry. She was pissed that I went on a date and that I didn't tell her in advance. Then she tried to turn it around on me, telling me it wasn't a big deal so why wouldn't I just tell her."

Nat cut her off, "So you lost it."

Shauna nodded, "Yeah. I snapped at her. Told her it is a big fucking deal and it kills me and blah blah blah. We haven't talked in two days."

"If you're so upset then why not just call her and figure it out?"

Shauna sighed, “I just… I don’t know. What would it fix? The core issue is that I have spent over a year trying to put my life on hold to win her back, which is something I did gladly, but now she tells me she just wants to be friends and gets mad that I went on a date when she’s doing the same thing. This is all killing me and she’s either starting a fight or telling me it’s not a big deal. I don’t know that I’d be able to actually do anything to help. The problem will still be the problem. I love her and want her and she doesn’t want me back.”

Nat rolled her eyes, “Do you want me to just let you have that or do you want me to have this conversation?” Shauna threw her head back.

“Just say what you need to say.”

“We both know she wants you. She’s terrified. You both are. She’s terrified to trust you again and you’re terrified to be anything less than codependent. I’m not saying that means you should wait around and stop living your life, but I don’t want you to convince yourself that she doesn’t care about you. She very clearly does.”

Shauna shook her head, “What if that isn’t enough, though?”

“You need to get out there and live to figure out if it is. That’s all I’ve been trying to say. I’m not saying just give up on her.” Shauna shook her head and Nat sighed, “You guys have been codependent your whole lives. Now you’re both freaking out because you can’t be. Figure out how to actually live a real, full life on your own and maybe you guys can bring that shit together when you’re ready to. The bickering is not helpful.”

“I mean… yeah. You’re right, obviously. Does that mean that I should call or?”

“You probably need to say sorry for yelling, yeah. But you need to have a real conversation. Do you want to know about dates? Would it be better if y’all just never spoke of it?” Shauna was appalled. No, definitely not.

“And find out when I’m drunk and stuck in room full of her friends on every break? Fuck no.”

Nat shook her head, “I’m just saying that’s the type of shit you need to be communicating about.”

Shauna nodded, “Yeah, yeah. I know. I’ll get there I just need to like write down a script or something because I’m never gonna be able to just say that.” Nat laughed. “I invited him to the bar tomorrow. You think Lot will go with me?”

“If you ask her to, yeah for sure.” Shauna nodded and Nat directed her attention back to the TV. “Can I play my movie now?”

“I mean if you really want to, sure. It looks fucking terrible.” Nat threw a pillow at Shauna and pressed play, basically telling her to shut the fuck up and stop interrupting her movie time. Shauna took a nap on the couch, feeling kind of comforted by the presence of someone else.

The nap proved to be a mistake, because later that night Shauna could not get to sleep or stay asleep for the life of her. She was bombarded with dream after dream of Jackie. Most of them related to the picture she kept of her on her nightstand. It was from the summer they

had spent together. Jackie was wearing a strapless dress on her bed. They had snuck upstairs after a night out. It had to have been like four or five in the morning and she just looked so fucking hot. Shauna knew she needed a picture. Jackie had this adorable wide grin and her lipstick was smudged. Her hair was sprawled out and she was posing with her hands under her chin. Shauna remembered that night. It had been so fucking hard to stay quiet. Jackie had fucking *devoured* her, testing her limits and purposefully pushing her closer and closer to screams. The night ended with Jackie's hand held firmly over Shauna's mouth and her laughter buried in the crook of her neck. It was perfect. It was a perfect night.

Her first dream was innocent, just them sitting in Shauna's bedroom. Jackie had a magazine and Shauna was reading Mrs. Dollaway. Jackie slowly moved her legs on top of Shauna's like she had so many times before they started hooking up. Then, she woke up to the sound of the phone ringing. Of course it hadn't been ringing, and she was just actually going fucking crazy.

The dreams after that were… less innocent. They involved Jackie in that fucking dress and then Jackie not in that dress. Every time she got to her own dream climax she heard the phone ring, waking her up to dead silence in the middle of the night. Jackie was fucking torturing her. Maybe she always would be.

Chapter 35

Shauna gave up on sleep at 4 am. She ran to the gym, lifted till 9 and then ran home to make breakfast. She ran into Lottie, who agreed to meet them at the bar later. She went to class and saw Adam for a few seconds to confirm their plans. Shauna was torn. She couldn't decide whether or not to be excited about it. Sure she had liked their date, she had liked the sex, but she also threw up after and had to finish herself off to thoughts of Jackie.

She got back from class at 5 and went back to the gym. She hadn't eaten and couldn't bring herself to. She was just so fucking anxious. She tried to distract herself with a workout, but her vision started to get blurry, and she decided to just walk home. When she got there she pretty much immediately started drinking. She drank a beer before getting in the shower and when Lottie got home, she was already tipsy. Lottie matched the energy and took a few shots with her. Soon enough they were on their way to the bar. It wasn't far, but it felt like it was. Shauna tripped over two curbs on the way and she couldn't stop laughing at herself. She was a fucking mess. Adam got there and they danced, kissed, drank more. It was comfortable. It was fun, but Adam had to go home kind of early to let his roommates dog out. Shauna was kind of shocked by how little she cared that he left. She found someone else in the crowd to dance with, and when Nat cut her off, went to the other side of the bar to get a couple shots. She remembered the bar lights turning on, signaling the end of the night and then throwing up on the street outside… and that was it.

Then, she woke up in her bed. There was a trash bag next to her and she was still in the skirt she had gone out in. Fuck. She had completely blacked out. Shauna looked up and found tylenol on her nightstand with a glass of water, which she downed pretty much right away. It was a good effort, but it came right back up. Shauna pulled the trash bag up to her face and emptied the contents of her stomach into it. She heard a knock on the bedroom door, but didn't have the energy to turn to see Nat open her bedroom door and walk in. She felt her sit on her bed and start rubbing her back. Shauna let the bag fall to the floor and leaned back on her headboard. "So… how much do you remember?" Nat asked.

It hurt Shauna's head to really think about it, but she tried her best. "I remember drinking and dancing and drinking more and then the lights turned on and I was throwing up on the street. After that… nothing." Nat shook her head.

"Mark told me you ordered drinks behind my back. That shit pisses me off, Shipman." Shauna nodded.

"It was dumb. I'm feeling the consequences now. I'm sorry. How did you get me back?"

"Lot and I practically carried you, actually."

"Fuck I'm sorry. I was just trying to relax, and like… breathe again. Clearly I went fucking overboard."

Nat laughed, "It happens, just don't go behind my back again." Shauna nodded and Nat rested her head on her shoulder. "So… you called Jackie last night."

Shauna sat straight up in bed, letting Nat's head fall hard onto the pillows. She WHAT? "What did I say?"

Nat laughed and sat back up. "I don't have a clue. I thought you were in bed but I heard you giggling, walked in and you were leaving Jackie a voicemail."

Shauna felt all the blood drain from her face. Fuck. What the fuck had she done? She leaned back over and threw up again in the trash bag. Nat grabbed her hair and held her upright. "It's okay. Really, it's gonna be okay."

Shauna took a deep breath. "I gotta call her. Fuck I gotta talk to her." Nat nodded and walked out of the room, promising to come check on her in a couple minutes. Shauna took a deep breath and walked to her desk, sat down in her chair, and dialed Jackie's phone number.

She listened to it ring with nothing but bile sitting in her stomach. She had really fucked up. She had really, really fucked up. There were only a few options, really. She fessed up about Adam and Taylor, or she was ridiculously sexual and flirty or she cried and told her she loved her and missed her. She heard the phone pick up and choked on her own spit.

"Hey, it's Jackie." Shauna felt herself exhale. All that alcohol to try to get that same feeling and this whole time, all she had to do was call her.

"Hey, Jax." How was she supposed to approach this?

"Oh, Shauna. Hi." Shauna laughed awkwardly. This sucked.

"Hey…"

"Did you have fun last night?" Jackie asked it like it was meant to be hurtful, and it was. The blow definitely landed.

"I had a little bit too much to drink."

Jackie laughed, and Shauna started to feel a little better. If she was laughing it couldn't have been too bad. "Yeah, I could tell. How much do you remember?"

"Um, well… I kind of remember leaving the bar." Jackie laughed at her and Shauna sighed, "Nat told me I called you last night."

"You don't remember any of it?"

Shauna rubbed her eyes with her hands, "No, not any of it."

"I didn't really think you were gonna." Shauna groaned. This was bad. She must've been really fucking drunk.

"Oh, god. What did I say?" Jackie hesitated for way too long, and every second she let the tension build, Shauna spent in complete panic mode.

"Hmm… what *did* you say?" Jackie teased. Shauna literally felt sick.

"Oh, come on Jax. Tell me!" Jackie laughed. She had no intention of that. Shauna probably deserved it, but it was driving her crazy.

"I don't know… maybe I'll have to just listen to the four minute voicemail again to jog my memory. Might have to call you back." FOUR MINUTES? What the fuck did she say for

four minutes? Maybe she had hit all of her potential conversation topics. She was so fucked.

"Was it bad?"

Jackie paused. It was bad. It was definitely bad. "It was… honest." Yeah, that pretty much confirmed it, but she wanted to know what. She wanted to know *exactly* what she had said.

"Jackie, you're killing me here."

"It's fine, Shipman. Really." That meant it wasn't. Fine never meant fine.

Shauna took a deep breath, "I'm sorry. I don't know what I said, but I'm sorry if I crossed a line or if I said something to hurt you."

"So, what'd you do last night?" Jackie asked. Shauna wanted to press it, but knew she didn't really have that privilege.

"Drank. A lot. Lot and I went to visit Nat at work. She felt like partying and I was just having too much fun, I guess."

"That's what college is for. It's good that you loosened up a bit, had some fun." Jackie sounded like she meant it, which was a little confusing. It was hard for Shauna to really get a read on the conversation. Jackie seemed like she was hurt but also kind of having fun? And her having fun meant the conversation felt kind of light, which also felt wrong.

"Yeah…" Shauna sighed again, "You're really not gonna tell me?" Jackie laughed.

"How about this… you tell me what you think you said and I'll tell you yes or no?"

"That feels like a trap…" Like a very, very dangerous trap.

"It's the best offer I've got." Shauna considered. She could at least play it safe.

"Okay, okay… did I at least apologize for yelling at you the other day?"

"Yes, you did. It was probably a little overdue though I'd say." That was fair. She shouldn't have yelled, and she should've just grown a pair and apologized instead of being too scared of the rest of it.

"Yeah… it was. I'm sorry. For not calling and for yelling and getting frustrated. I'm getting used to stuff you know? It's hard… to hear about you on dates."

"Okay, apology accepted. I might've been kind of a bitch. I just want us to be able to talk."

"Yeah… me too." Shauna thought for a minute. Maybe she could try to take a step forward, "Can I try?"

Jackie hesitated before answering, "Yeah, ask me whatever."

"Are you gonna go out with her again?" Asking the question alone made her want to cry. She wasn't sure if she wanted to know the answer.

"I don't think so. She was nice but you know, just wasn't right. Didn't feel right." Shauna allowed herself to really breathe for the first time in days. It was wrong of her to be

so relieved, but she couldn't help it.

Shauna took a deep breath, preparing herself for what she was about to offer up. "I've gone on a couple dates, too."

"Oh, I heard." Jackie huffed into the phone and Shauna's heart sunk. Fuck her stupid drunk ass. She couldn't imagine Jackie finding out via drunken voicemail. She hoped she wasn't mean at least.

"Fuck. Jackie, come on. What did I say?" Shauna was practically begging her at this point.

"Nope, that voicemail is mine and mine only. If you wanna know you're gonna have to come listen to it yourself." Shauna laughed. They were fine. That was an invitation to visit, right? It couldn't have been too bad.

"Don't tempt me." It was flirty. Shauna hadn't intended on it to come out that way, but it definitely did. Jackie took a deep breath and Shauna could hear it over the phone. Flirting had clearly been a mistake.

"You like him?" Jackie said it and Shauna's heart broke a little bit. It was evil that they were talking about this. It was fucking awful that they had to have this conversation. It was awful to hear her heart break over the phone.

Shauna took her time answering, "I don't know yet. Maybe. I don't hate him, I don't think."

Jackie took a shakey breath before she answered, "Good. I'm glad you're giving it a chance." Shauna didn't say anything. There really wasn't much to say. "I should probably get going pretty soon."

Shauna panicked. She didn't want her to go. She really didn't want her to go. She wanted to know what this fucking voicemail said. "Yeah, for sure. Just one more thing…"

"Yeah?" Jackie asked. She seemed tired.

"Did I, you know… break any rules, cross any lines?" Jackie laughed. Yeah she probably had. Fuck.

"Yeah, you definitely broke some rules, crossed some lines."

Shauna felt her muscles go weak. What a mess. She really sat on the phone giggling about Adam and then crossing their lines all in the same breath? God she was such a bitch. If Jackie had done that… Shauna would've been crushed. Fuck. "Oh, god. I'm sorry—"

Jackie cut her off, "No. It's okay. I didn't… I don't mind. It's okay." Oh? She doesn't mind it? Was she just being nice or did she miss it as much as Shauna did? Jackie hung up before Shauna could ask any follow ups, and Shauna realized she kind of felt better. She felt a lot better, actually. As awful as it was, they were okay. They were talking. They were laughing. They would be okay. Maybe it would be awkward, but she wasn't going to lose her.

Chapter 36

They talked on the phone every day since, and it was a little awkward but it definitely wasn't bad. Just hearing her voice would've been enough for Shauna. Neither one of them mentioned their dates, which wasn't exactly what Shauna wanted but she also knew she couldn't handle it either way. Learning about her next dates or whatever and not spiraling didn't seem very realistic, and after their fight it felt like maybe the best thing would be to just lay low until Thanksgiving break.

Shauna followed her routine and just tried to ignore whatever the fuck her life had turned into. She really missed her. She was more than excited to see her again and be close to her again, but she was kind of dreading being in the same room and not sneaking off to go be together. She wasn't really sure she knew how to do that anymore. A couple days before Thanksgiving break, Adam caught up to her walking into class.

"Hey, any chance you want to get dinner tonight?"

"Oh, I'm sorry I really shouldn't. I'm trying to get some writing done before break."

Adam opened the door and held it for her. "Okay how about I bring over some takeout? We can bounce ideas off of each other." Shauna hesitated. "Not a date. Just… hanging out with someone who also needs to get some writing done over some food that I pay for and deliver."

"Hmm. Okay. I could get behind that. How about tomorrow night?" Adam beamed at her.

"Great. I'll be over tomorrow night then." Shauna nodded and offered to share her story with the class first. It was, of course, about Jackie. They always were in one way or another.

The next night, he showed up at her door with Chinese food and his journal. They set up on her bed, eating and peer editing. He was a… fine writer. He wasn't gonna like flunk out of the program, but it wasn't like he was best selling author material either. It made sense that he liked art better. Shauna looked up after covering his page in red pen. He looked over and laughed. "That bad, huh?"

Shauna took a bite of her Chinese food and laughed, "It's not bad. It just needs some work."

"Well I wish I could say the same, but this is great." Shauna smiled, handing him his page.

"You're being too nice, you know? It definitely needs work."

Adam laughed, taking a bite before speaking, "No, I don't know actually." Shauna smiled. At least he was self aware. "Sometimes I wish I could take you to my studio at home. I know writing isn't really my thing, but painting… I'm good at that. Maybe not as good as you are with these depressing stories you're always writing, but still."

"You don't paint while you're here?" Shauna asked.

Adam shook his head, “Who the fuck has any free time with all the reading assignments? I couldn’t imagine trying to also spend 12 hours on a painting.” Shauna laughed and nodded her head. That made sense.

“Maybe one day I’ll get to see them.” She couldn’t tell if she meant it or not.

Adam smiled, “Maybe one day.” They finished eating while Shauna helped him with his edits. She got up to throw the food away and ran into Lottie in the kitchen.

“Hey, what are you up to tonight?”

“Um, just writing and editing and stuff.”

Lottie raised her eyebrows at her, “I saw Adam’s car out front.”

Shauna laughed, “We are writing and editing and stuff together.” Lottie smiled at her and laughed.

“I won’t tell Jackie anything you don’t want her to know. I’d never just offer up information, you know?”

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry I wasn’t trying to like… hide it.”

“Listen Shauna, I wanna be *your* friend. I love Jackie, but I love you too. I don’t want you to think you can’t tell me stuff.”

Shauna smiled. Lottie looked genuinely worried. “I love you too, Lot. Thank you for saying that. You *are* my friend. I trust you I promise.” Lottie smiled and nodded, “I should probably get back to him, though.”

“Okay, have fun.” Shauna headed back to her bedroom and sat down next to Adam. He was looking at the picture of Jackie.

“Who’s this?” he asked.

Shauna took a deep breath. The picture looked innocent enough, but an individual picture of Jackie on her nightstand probably came off as a little more than friendly. “My best friend. The one I was in that fight with.”

“Oh, gotcha. She’s pretty.” Shauna smiled. She really was.

“Yeah, she is.” She caught herself staring at the picture and tore her eyes away to look at Adam. He was a little disappointing in comparison.

“This ex-boyfriend of hers kind of landed the jackpot,” he joked. Shauna half gasped and half laughed, not having expected him to bring up fucking Jeff. ‘Kidding, kidding of course.’ Shauna laughed and Adam leaned in closer to her. “You are beautiful. You know that, right?” Shauna sighed. To call Jackie pretty and Shauna beautiful should be a crime. Jackie was like a fucking goddess. To compare anyone to her was clinically insane. Instead of answering his question, Shauna climbed on top of him.

She leaned down and kissed him. She felt him grab her hips and she wrapped her arms around his neck in response. Shauna pulled away and Adam cut her off with a smile, “Not dating. I know.” He pulled his shirt over his head and Shauna undid his belt. She crawled down his legs and took it in her mouth, kissing and licking her way up. He groaned and

threw his head back and Shauna bobbed her head on it, tucking her lips under her teeth and moving her tongue in circles over his tip. He groaned. "You're so fucking good, baby." Shauna kind of loved the praise and she pulled him back all the way down her throat. He moaned softly and she kicked her pants off as she climbed back up him. He pulled out a condom and put it on. Shauna sat down on his dick and slowly took all of him. He was a little bit bigger than Jeff, but not much. Shauna just hadn't really experienced anything bigger than a few fingers in a very long time, so it took a second to adjust. His hands moved up to Shauna's tits and pulled her shirt up over them. He pulled at her nipples and Shauna moaned softly, starting to move up and grind back down on him. He grabbed her hips and pulled himself to sit up closer to her, holding her there with his arms around her back. Shauna bit into his neck and sucked softly on the skin. She felt his hand grab her ass and move it up and down and heard him moan. Shauna rode him like that for 10 minutes. She could feel herself getting there but just couldn't actually do it. She focused so hard on trying to cum but it just wasn't doing it for her. She was so close she could've started crying. She looked over his shoulder at Jackie's picture and locked eyes with her. Shauna moaned and started riding him harder, never tearing her eyes away from Jackie as she *finally* fucking came. Adam moaned and grabbed the back of her head, pulling her in for a kiss as he came too. They slowed down and Shauna climbed off of him, catching her breath and throwing a pair of shorts on.

"Wow. You are like… fucking amazing," Adam said. Shauna looked away with a smile. He treated her like she was the best thing that ever happened to him. It was kind of insane, actually.

"I'm glad you think so." Shauna smiled at him and sat down at her desk. Adam must've taken the distance as direction to get out. Shauna wasn't sure if she had intended it that way or not, but she wasn't exactly upset about it, either.

"Alright, well I'm gonna take these edits… and see you tomorrow." Shauna smiled at him and he walked over to her, pulling his shirt back over his head. He leaned in and kissed her. "Thank you."

"Yeah, anytime," Shauna said with a smile. She did have fun with him. She definitely did. Adam walked out and Shauna got in the shower. Having sex with him didn't send her into too much of a self hate spiral like it had last time. It was still there, but it didn't feel like the world was going to come falling down around her.

She got to thinking about Jackie after she had changed into her pajamas and sat down at her journal. She wondered if she was sleeping with anyone. She wondered if she had been on more dates. Really, she didn't want to know, but she was fucking dying to know at the same time. She looked at the clock. It was only one. She knew she'd still be out. She usually got home at like 2. She thought about going to bed, but she really wanted to talk to her, so as pathetic as it sounded, she decided to stay up for another hour.

2 am hit and she dialed Jackie's number. She knew she would probably see her the next day, but she wanted to hear her voice. She really, really missed her. She listened to the line ring in anticipation, but Jackie didn't answer. Shauna sighed and started her voicemail. "Hey, Jax. It's me. I guess I was just calling to say hi. I figured you'd probably be back from the bar by now but maybe not. Okay, just um… call me later. Bye." Shauna collapsed into her bed and took a deep breath, trying to force her body to fall asleep.

She failed, obviously and spent the whole night waiting for Jackie's call. It never came, and that next morning she got in the car and drove her, Lottie and Nat home. It was quiet for a minute before Lottie spoke up. "So, just so you know Jackie's gonna be staying at mine over break." Shauna's head snapped to the back. Why? "She didn't tell you?"

"No. Well, she mentioned that her parents were thinking about selling the house. I didn't know that they did."

"Oh, yeah. I made her promise to stay with me."

"Okay. Good, then." Shauna's heart raced at the realization that there really was nothing tying her to her hometown anymore.

Nat looked back at Lottie and even though she was driving, Shauna knew they were doing that annoying silent talking thing. She had learned to just let them. Nat turned back to her, "So… Adam, huh?"

Shauna laughed, "What exactly are you asking?"

"What are you guys?"

"Friends with benefits, I guess? I don't know. Not dating." Nat nodded and looked back at Lottie again.

"And you… like him?" Lottie asked it like she didn't believe it. Shauna couldn't really blame her.

"I don't… hate him, I guess? I don't know."

Nat laughed and Lottie hit her on the arm, "That's okay. You deserve to take your time figuring it out." Shauna laughed.

"Do you guys not like him?" she asked.

"No, it's not that!" Lottie exclaimed.

Nat laughed, "I just don't like… see it, I guess. But if you're not trying to date then it doesn't matter to me."

Now Shauna was curious. She didn't really care, but she did want to ask. "Why don't you see it?" Nat looked back at Lottie.

"He's just… I don't know."

Shauna knew. She laughed, "Boring?" Nat laughed and Lottie shook her head, suppressing a smile.

"That is not what we said for the record," Lottie said, holding her hands up for emphasis.

"No, I know. It's just easy. I don't have to like him for it to be easy, you know?"

Nat nodded. "If it's making you happy then fine by me." That was pretty much the end of the conversation. They got home and Tai and Van showed up to pick Lottie up to go get Jackie. They had decided that Nat would stay at Shauna's that night and let Jackie get settled and let them all hang out for a night and then just see each other either the night of Thanksgiving or the next day. It sucked to spend the night away from Jackie but Shauna

knew it was for the best. Her and Nat were sitting in the kitchen making dinner when her mom got home from work. She ran in and hugged them both.

"Oh, how I've missed my girls." Nat laughed and Shauna held her mom in probably the world's longest hug. She had really, really missed her.

"Hey, momma."

"How have you been? How was your semester?"

"It was good." Shauna paused. She hadn't told her she was talking to Jackie again, but she knew her mom would want to see her. She was scared to tell her until she knew it would be real, and now she knew it was time. "I actually have something to tell you." Nat's eyes got big and Shauna ignored it.

"What's up, honey?"

"Jackie and I have been talking a bit. We're trying to be friends again." Deb's smile grew exponentially.

"Oh, that's amazing! That's such great news. Oh! I know! Invite her over for Thanksgiving. She can come over after her family's like old times."

Shauna tried to hide her excitement, but yeah. That would be fucking great. "Her family actually moved. It's just her."

"Oh, well then absolutely. She should come over for dinner. I managed to get the night off work. I just have to go back in tonight." Shauna looked at the clock. It was only 10 am. She was gonna be exhausted.

"Okay. I'll call her tomorrow then and invite her." Deb had a spring in her step that Shauna hadn't seen in a long time. It warmed her heart, honestly. She grabbed dinner and ate with them before heading off to bed.

"I had no fucking clue what you were about to tell her," Nat said as soon as Deb's bedroom door shut.

"What else would I have told her?"

"Girl, I don't know. About Adam or something?"

"No. Adam is never meeting my mother. She doesn't need to know he exists."

Nat laughed, "Okay, understood. Are you gonna be okay alone at dinner with her tomorrow?"

Shauna shrugged, "I mean my mom will be there."

Nat scoffed at her, "Shauna your mom goes to bed at like 7 pm on a good day. You guys are definitely going to be alone."

Shauna smiled. She hoped so. "We'll be okay. I'm kind of looking forward to it, honestly. I really miss her."

Nat nodded and they spent the rest of the night on the couch watching movies. It had been a long day, and it didn't take them long to fall asleep. The next morning, Shauna woke up to

Nat snoring and completely sprawled out on the floor. She laughed and got up quietly, walking to the kitchen and making eggs and bacon. She wanted to call Jackie so badly, but she knew she wouldn't be awake yet. She waited until 10, eating her breakfast and taking a shower before heading down to the phone. Nat decided to take a shower too, so she had a decent amount of privacy. She dialed Lottie's number and took a sip of coffee while it rang.

"Matthews' residence, this is Charlotte," Lottie said when she answered.

"Hey, Lot it's me. Is Jackie there?"

"Yes. She's upstairs one sec."

Shauna listened to the silence in quiet anticipation until Jackie's voice came across the phone. "Hey, it's Jackie!"

Shauna couldn't help but smile. "Hey, Jax. It's Shauna."

"Oh, hey!" She sounded so excited that any anxiety she had went right out the window. "What's up?"

"Well, I talked to my mom and we'd both really love it if you'd come over for Thanksgiving. It won't be anything crazy, just the two of us, but you've always been family." Jackie sighed happily on the line and Shauna turned around to lean against the counter with a ridiculously big smile on her face.

"I'd really like that, yeah. Thank you. Tell your mom I say thank you." She sounded so genuinely touched to get the invite, and Shauna was so grateful she brought it up to her mom. She was so fucking excited to see her.

"Don't mention it, seriously. My mom said dinner's at 6, so probably be there by 7," Shauna laughed at herself and Jackie did too. Her mom had always struggled to stick to a schedule. Dinner would happen, just maybe not when they thought it would. It was just expected at this point.

"Deal. Thank you, again. I'll see you then." Jackie hung up the phone and Shauna smiled to herself. She was so whipped. Nat walked downstairs and Shauna turned to face her.

"You call her?"

"Yeah. She will be here tonight."

"Good. That'll be good." Nat sounded unsure and Shauna laughed. It probably would not be good but at this point… it's Jackie. Who cares?

"When did you wanna get back to Lot's place?" Shauna asked.

"Soon, probably. I miss her."

"Awe Natty… How sweet." Nat shoved her and laughed.

"You do not get to use that," she said. Shauna laughed and pushed her back.

"I'll take you home to your wife. Let me grab my keys and we'll go." Shauna ran upstairs to change into workout clothes and grab her keys. She dropped Nat off and drove to the weight room to try to decrease the ridiculous amounts of stress running through her about

dinner. She was excited, of course. But her mom didn't know anything, and she didn't really know how it was going to go. Jackie and her hadn't been great at being discreet about her feelings, so she just hoped her mom wouldn't pick up on much.

After her workout, she decided to run through McDonald's, expecting that dinner would probably be later rather than sooner. She grabbed some fries and a diet coke and ate them on the way home. She stashed the wrappers in her car so that her mom wouldn't be offended or feel called out for her timeliness issues. After parking her car and taking a deep breath, she prepared herself for what the rest of the day was going to be. She decided she was going to show Jackie that she could be a friend. She wanted to prove to her that they could really figure this out and do this, if she really wanted her to.

Chapter 37

She walked into the kitchen and her mom had already baked a pie. “Hey, mom. Did you sleep at all when you got home?”

“No, no. I’ll sleep tonight. I want to make you guys a real Thanksgiving dinner.”

“I can cook, though. You should try to take a nap.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, honey. Let your mom cook a meal.” Shauna knew it wasn’t up for discussion so she decided instead of fighting her on it she would just start pitching in. Two hours in, they had the turkey in the oven and the desserts done. Shauna heard a knock at the door and looked at the clock. Jackie was two hours early. Deb practically ran to the door. She opened it and pulled Jackie into a tight, tearfilled hug. She was holding a store bought pie and was wearing a dark blue sweater with a pair of jeans. Her hair was in a half up half down look with two little pieces that fell down to frame her face. She looked beautiful.

“Oh, Jacqueline! I have missed you so much. I’m so glad you’re here.”

Jackie shot Shauna a wide grin and responded, “You have no idea how much I’ve missed you guys too.” Shauna smiled at her, clocking that she said ‘you guys’ and not just ‘you’.

“So your parents moved away? Where are you staying, honey? You know you’re always welcome here.” Deb sent a look over to Shauna, saying without words that it was not up for discussion and pulling Jackie toward the kitchen.

Shauna laughed and smiled, “Yeah they did. I’m staying at the Matthews’ place. Lot’s parents are gone too and she made me promise I’d live there instead of moving with my parents.”

“Oh, okay. Well, the offer stands.” Deb grabbed the pie from Jackie and set it on the counter. ‘It was so sweet of you to bring something but you know you don’t have to, right?’ She didn’t even let Jackie respond before shoving a wine glass in her hand, filling it and then moving to do the same for Shauna. “Since my kids are old enough to drink now.” The whole cooking process was a mess, but it was fucking great. Jackie was the one to finally get Deb to sit down, which Shauna was grateful for. She should’ve known she’d be more likely to listen to Jackie than her. Deb ordered her and Jackie around the kitchen, making mac and cheese, mashed potatoes and greens. The turkey was nowhere near ready by 6, and when Shauna read off the temperature at 140, they both looked first at each other and then at Deb.

“Okay, fuck it. We’ll just start with dessert. How’s that?” Jackie laughed and Shauna grabbed the pies, bringing them to the table with forks and some knives. Jackie spun around her to grab the bottle of wine and bring it to the table, refilling everybody’s drinks.

“I think this was a great idea, Momma Ship,” Jackie said.

“Yeah, me too,” Shauna agreed.

Deb smiled, taking a bite of pie. "I really am so grateful for the invite. This was so much better than I could've ever imagined."

Deb smiled at her and then Shauna. "We're both just glad you came home, honey." Shauna blushed and Jackie looked at her with a smile. The turkey was ready around 7, as expected and Shauna sliced it up while Jackie and Deb talked at the table. Jackie walked in to grab the mac and cheese and set the table and stopped to talk.

"Hi," she said with a smile.

Shauna had to focus on not losing a finger, because she was feeling very distracted. "Hey. I'm really glad you came."

"Yeah, me too. Sorry I feel like we haven't really talked, I just like *really* missed your mom."

Shauna smiled. She wasn't upset. It had honestly been just as nice to sit back and watch them catch up. It was so important for all of them that Shauna couldn't ever be upset about it. "No, no. She's cooler than me anyway." Jackie laughed.

"Oh, definitely." Shauna chuckled and set the knife down to look at her. "I really did miss you too, though. It's nice, you know? Being here with you guys. I don't know, I just… I really missed you." Shauna felt herself blush but before she could say anything Jackie had already turned around and left the room. She cleared her throat and finished slicing the turkey before walking it into the dining room and sitting down to eat. At that point they were all three glasses in and definitely tipsy. By the end of dinner they were teetering on the edge of drunk. Deb said goodnight and apologized for leaving the dishes to them, but she was exhausted. Shauna wouldn't have let her do the dishes anyway.

When she disappeared into her bedroom, Jackie turned and shot Shauna a concerned look. It was definitely early. The concern made sense. "She worked the night shift last night, she hasn't slept yet." Jackie's eyes flashed with worry and then just like… gratitude.

"Seriously, thank you for the invite. I've missed it over here." Jackie looked around the room with a smile on her face and tears in her eyes. Shauna fucking loved looking at her.

"You don't have to keep thanking me, you know." Jackie smiled, her eyes focused back on her. "We couldn't have had it without you, Jax." They stood in silence, waiting to see what was going to come next. Shauna really didn't want her to leave.

"It's still kinda early… want another glass?" Shauna offered it knowing it would break their rules, but she didn't care. She felt like she had barely gotten to talk to her. Jackie looked past Shauna, chewing on the inside of her cheek and being very obviously hesitant. She was nervous about the rules. "We'll stay in the living room. It's practically in public." She gave Jackie her best smile and watched her hesitation bleed out. Jackie nodded enthusiastically and held out her glass for Shauna to refill. She gave her a smile and turned to refill it as Jackie walked to the living room and sat on the couch. Shauna put her Pretty Woman tape in, knowing that Jackie would want to watch it and then sat down opposite her, leaving enough distance to stay friendly. They talked all the way through the movie, not even sparing it a glance. Two glasses later, it was very clear that Shauna was not going to be able to drive her home. Every movement brought their bodies involuntarily closer to each other. By the time the credits rolled, their thighs were touching. Shauna noticed that Jackie couldn't

draw her attention off of her lips, and it was starting to feel very dangerous even in the 'practically public' living room. Shauna sat up to face her as she talked about what it's like living with Renee. She asked a question that sober Shauna probably wouldn't have, but honestly fuck it.

"Do you ever get drunk and end up in each other's beds?" she thought she played it off pretty well, and it seemed like Jackie didn't pick up on her jealousy.

"What?" Jackie laughed, "No, of course not."

Of course not felt like a crazy thing to say, considering the way they typically fucking interact. "You say that like you're not all up on each other all the time." Shauna made sure to hold her smile, but she didn't mean it as a joke.

"We haven't been. We aren't really like that anymore." Shauna's fake smile grew wider and way more genuine and Jackie laughed. "You don't have to look so excited about it, Shipman. It was never a big deal."

There was that line again, 'not a big deal'. Of course it was a big deal. Shauna's eyes locked onto Jackie's and she got completely lost in them. "You kissing somebody else definitely felt like a big deal." Shauna took another sip of her wine, breaking the eye contact she had been losing it over.

"Felt like? Past tense?" Jackie teased. Shauna rolled her eyes and Jackie took a sip, looking at her over the rim of the glass.

She couldn't help but answer honestly, "You just looking at somebody that isn't me feels like a big deal." Jackie's eyes got wide, like Shauna had surprised her. It felt crazy that Shauna's jealousy would be a surprise. She had been pretty transparent about it. She watched Jackie's cheeks get red and Shauna couldn't help but grin at the effect she had made.

"So you said in your voicemail." Shauna's grin was swept completely off her face, instead now moving over to Jackie's.

"That's not fair. I can't believe you're not gonna tell me what I said!"

"I can't believe you drunk called me and not your new boyfriend," Jackie shot. So she knew about Adam then. Had Shauna really called him her boyfriend in the voicemail? There was absolutely no way.

"He's not my boyfriend, Jackie." Shauna watched her roll her eyes and finish her drink, then felt the contact leave her thigh as she stood up to refill her glass. She couldn't help the sigh that escaped her. She rubbed her eyes with her hands and then looked back up at her. "Come on, what did I say? You really don't want to talk about it?"

Jackie sat back down, "You really want to know?" Hadn't that been obvious? Shauna nodded and Jackie took a sip of her wine before leaning in. For a second, Shauna thought she was going to kiss her, but she stopped. Shauna cocked her head to the side, not sure what she was trying to do. 'We're in public, Shauna,' she scolded. "Can't let your mom hear." Shauna grinned and leaned in, inches from her face now. It took everything for her to not just kiss her, but she wanted to know what this fucking voicemail said.

"Tell me," Shauna whispered. Jackie's face flushed and then she stared into her eyes like she was looking into her soul.

Her eyes went dark and Shauna prepared herself, "You told me that you keep a picture of me by your bed…" Oh god. The one that she had used to get off? Jesus Christ. She felt her face get hot and watched a smile cover Jackie's face. At least she had liked it. That part, at least. 'You told me that all you want to do is say everything you know you shouldn't.' Also true. Shauna's throat felt dry and she swallowed, watching Jackie's eyes drop down to it. "You told me how sexy I was, and that you missed me…" Shauna was enamored by every word out of Jackie's mouth. Apparently she had been very honest. "You told me that you wished I was there." Shauna looked down at her lips. Of course she had. None of this was dishonest. She fucking always wanted Jackie there. "You told me that if I was in your bedroom we wouldn't be just friends anymore." Shauna looked up from her lips, trying to get a read on how Jackie felt about that. She looked like she was ready to just throw it all out the window. Shauna wanted her to. She wanted her to lean in and kiss her. She wanted to just say fuck it. "You told me… that you didn't like it as much with him." Jackie pulled away from the face slap that sentence felt like. Shauna knew it must have been so much worse for Jackie to hear. Fuck. Shauna needed her to know that regardless of however it might have come off in the voicemail, generally it was the truth. She leaned in, holding herself up with her arm on the back of the couch to close the distance Jackie had created.

"I don't." Jackie's eyes shot down to her lips and then her tits. Her face got red and she exhaled in a way that made Shauna just want to fucking jump her bones. Jackie's eyes wandered and she leaned in just slightly. She wanted it. Shauna knew she wanted it.

She took a deep breath, looking back up at her eyes. "You're drunk."

"And?" Shauna said, holding her eyes now. She didn't want Jackie to look away.

Jackie's breathing got shallow and they were so close. They had to have been so close. "Maybe I should call Van so she can drive me home." Shauna's brow creased and she looked down at Jackie's lips. She wanted to say please fucking don't, but she knew she couldn't. She couldn't beg. "Maybe we should go upstairs." Jackie's breath hitched and stared down at Shauna's tits. Her cleavage was on full display with the position she was in, and she hoped it was working to her benefit. She wanted Jackie to look. Shauna could feel the words working their way out of Jackie's mouth, but then something in her demeanor changed. Her eyes looked down and her body tensed.

Shauna backed away slightly, sensing the way things had completely turned around. Jackie reached out and gently put a hand on her knee. "I think I'm going to call Van." It felt like a fucking gut punch. Shauna held her breath and sat back down.

"Okay. I suppose we are already pushing the rules." Jackie looked at her like she was a kicked puppy. It sucked. Being rejected *again* fucking fucked. She stood up and walked into the kitchen. Shauna could hear her voice and was trying to let her emotions settle, but she felt like she was going to fucking cry. She took a deep breath as Jackie sat back down on the couch. "I'm sorry." Shauna said, unable to look at her.

"Why? I started it." She had, yeah, but still.

“Yeah but I pushed it.” They sat in a very heavy silence for a few seconds before Shauna exhaled and just said what she knew they were both thinking. “We were friends for most of our lives and now we can’t spend a night alone together without pushing it.”

Jackie let it sit for a second. “I’m not sure we were ever just friends.” Shauna looked up at her, desperately wanting to know if she meant that in a good way or a bad way. She smiled at her and Shauna’s heart broke a little. This was so fucking miserable.

“Do you think we can be?”

Jackie sighed, “I think we’re trying.” Shauna nodded and stared at the floor. She couldn’t just sit there for the next ten minutes in silence, so she stood up and headed to the kitchen to do something productive. She packed up the food and Jackie started on the dishes. They worked together but in complete silence. Van’s car pulled up and Jackie sighed, pulling her into a hug.

“I love you, Shauna. We’ll figure this out, okay?” Shauna felt her throat close up and she couldn’t even say it back. She knew she was seconds from tears. Trying to speak just wasn’t even an option, so she nodded and Jackie offered her a small smile before walking out the door. Shauna felt her whole body untense and she walked out the back door to sit on the patio and just cry. She cried for a long time, until she ran entirely out of tears and just sat. She sat and stared until the sun started coming up, which she took as a sign to just go to bed. She walked up the stairs and crashed, finally letting her eyes close.

Chapter 38

She woke up several times throughout the day, but she couldn't even think to get out of bed. She just turned over and fell back to sleep. She did this over and over again until Nat walked in.

"Here my dumbass was thinking you'd be at the gym. Walked all that way for nothing." Shauna let out a little pathetic laugh and Nat sat down next to her. "Haven't made it there yet, I take it?"

Shauna shook her head, "What time is it?"

"Well, it's like 4:30 actually. Do you want to talk about it?"

Shauna shook her head again, sitting up and rubbing her head. "I'm okay. I'm just tired."

"Uh huh, uh huh," Nat said. "So would it be good or bad if I told you we're all going out to the club tonight." Shauna groaned.

"God I don't fucking know."

"And if I told you it's actually for Van because her thanksgiving was ass?"

"So I'd look like a dick if I didn't show?"

"I mean I wouldn't take it that way, but I don't know that Tai needs any more reasons to hate you if you not going takes Jackie's attention away from Van." Shauna laughed. This was so fucking dumb. Her whole life was just going to be getting rejected over and over again.

"Well I guess I'm going out, then."

"We'll hang the whole time. Promise. It'll be alright." Shauna nodded and Nat leaned into her a little bit. 'Did you want to work out before you go?' Shauna shook her head. She really wanted to just lay there. "Maybe shower even?"

Shauna laughed, "Not yet. I really just want to lay here if that's okay."

"Can I hang with you?" Shauna sighed. She wanted to say no, but she knew the company would probably help her.

"It's sweet that you're asking like I'm allowed to have an opinion on it." Nat pursed her lips and laughed.

"You're right. If you're napping, I'm napping." Nat got under the covers and Shauna shook her head. She let herself just fall right back to sleep.

Lottie came and woke them both up at 7. "Are you guys fucking serious? We're leaving in 3 hours and you're passed out in bed?"

Nat shot up and Shauna groaned, "We're sad today, Lot," Nat said, grabbing Lottie's hand and pulling her into bed between them. Lottie gave in and wrapped her arms around both of

them.

"What? Why? I thought Thanksgiving went well?"

Shauna sighed, "It did. It was good."

Nat turned and looked at her over Lottie, "What are we moping in bed for then?"

"She just like… rejected me. Again. I'm sure it was great from her perspective."

"Rejected you how?" Lottie asked.

"She got like inches from my face and she was looking at me like it was going to happen. She was being flirty and I was being flirty and I invited her upstairs. She looked like she was into it and then her face just changed and she called Van to pick her up."

Lottie's brow furrowed and Nat threw her head back into Shauna's pillows and sighed. Shauna felt the need to just blow past it. She kind of regretted saying anything. "But it's fine. I'm going out tonight. It'll be fun or whatever."

Nat and Lottie made eye contact and Shauna rolled her eyes, "Okay, come on. We're up. I don't wanna talk about it. Please." She sat up and grabbed their hands.

"Just get ready at mine, yeah?" Lottie asked and Shauna nodded. She threw a nice black tank top and a pair of jean shorts in a bag, not really feeling the energy to pick out something nice. She grabbed her eyeliner, mascara and straightener and threw it into the bag too.

Jackie greeted her with a hug, and Shauna smiled and hugged her back. She tried really hard to not look at her, but she had this tight dark blue dress on that really had the potential to drive Shauna fucking crazy. She had decided to keep her distance. She just couldn't take another rejection and if Jackie wanted to follow the rules then that's what they'd do. They were as friendly and normal as possible until Jackie started taking shots. Shauna decided to just be somewhere else. It hurt her to be actively moving away from Jackie, but she just couldn't handle more flirting or more looking at each other or touching. She didn't have it in her.

Nat noticed it and stayed by her side all pregame. Shauna decided not to drink. She didn't want to put herself in a position to be hurt again, and not drinking felt the best way to protect herself. It was all going well until they had to pack themselves into the car. Shauna of course ended up squished between Jackie and the window. She was already drunk, and Shauna caught her staring at her multiple times. Jackie pushed her thighs into Shauna's and her eyes were practically glued to her tits. That being said, Shauna also caught herself pushing them out. She was torn. She wanted Jackie to look at her. Obviously she wanted Jackie to fucking look at her, but she couldn't do this again. She couldn't have Jackie staring like that when they both knew Jackie was going to turn her away again.

When they got to the club, Shauna found a comfortable seat at the bar top. She knew that even looking at the dancefloor was a recipe for disaster, so she removed herself. Nat and Lottie sat next to her. "Look at you being all mature or whatever…" Nat teased.

"I do not need to see her dancing with somebody else right now, and she's drunk enough that she doesn't need to see me doing it either."

"Very evolved, Shipman," Lottie said. "Want a beer?"

"Yes please." Lottie ordered them a round and Shauna did everything she could to not look to her right. She instead stared straight ahead at Nat and Lottie. "So what did y'all do today?"

"Well before you got my girlfriend in your bed…" Lottie shot a joking look at her, "We went to this like woodsy date thing. It was really cute."

Nat smiled at her, "Yeah, it was fun."

"That sounds cute, guys," Shauna said. She trained her eyes on the floor as Jackie and Tai walked up to grab drinks. Jackie shot her a smile and that was kind of the extent of their interaction.

"Jesus. I don't think you've ever like… not fucking stared at her before," Nat said with a laugh. Lottie smacked her arm and Shauna smiled.

"I'm just trying to try to move forward a little. I can't keep doing this to myself."

Nat nodded and they spent the night gossiping over the music about everybody from high school. Shauna nursed her one beer as Lottie told them that Laura Lee had completely done a 180. Apparently she left the church and called Lottie to tell her she was coming out as queer. Nat raised her eyebrows, "So she called you?"

Lottie laughed, "Oh stop it wasn't like that. We were friends."

"I always had a suspicion she had a crush on you… interesting," Nat said with a hand on her chin. Shauna laughed and Lottie hit her shoulder. Nat's eyes got big and both her and Lottie started looking over Shauna's shoulder. She turned and found Jackie storming up to the bar. She looked pissed or frustrated about *something* and it was fucking hot. Shauna took a deep breath and Jackie's eyes scanned the group. "Shots, anyone?" Shauna didn't answer at first. She just *looked* at her. She was so beautiful. Her eyes were so intense and all Shauna could think about was how badly she wanted her. Jackie's eyes moved up and down Shauna's body and it was like the space between them was on fire. Shauna took a deep breath and completely abandoned her plans to not drink.

"Yeah, I'm down." Jackie grinned at her and looked her up and down more confidently now, staring first at her lips and then her tits. Shauna's heart started beating way too fast and she felt her face get hot. She turned to the bartender with a smile.

"6 shots of vodka, please." Jesus Christ. SIX? Jackie looked at her reaction and laughed. "5 shots of vodka, actually." Shauna laughed, kind of surprised. What the fuck?

"You're gonna take 3 shots?" Jackie stared hard at Shauna's lips as she answered.

"Yes. I am. And you're taking two with me." She said it like a command, and Shauna responded like it was a knee jerk reaction.

"Yes ma'am." Jackie's eyes went dark and she looked Shauna dead in her eyes and grinned. Fuck. Shauna felt her breath hitch and that same familiar pull in her lower stomach. Jackie took a deep breath and reached for two of the glasses, sliding them over to Shauna. They took the first two together and Shauna just watched her take the last one. It was a little concerning, how much she was drinking, but Jackie was also just *so* fucking hot. Jackie set the last shot glass down, locked eyes with Shauna and grabbed her beer to chase it.

She set the bottle in Shauna's lap and turned without another word to head back to the dance floor.

Shauna took a deep breath and watched her walk away. Jesus Christ. "Damn. What the fuck was that about?" Nat asked. Shauna turned and saw them both with wide eyes.

"I don't have a fucking clue. Lot?"

Lottie shrugged, "Maybe she's just frustrated you're not paying much attention to her."

"Okay well that would be wrong if that's the case," Nat said. All Shauna could do was look at her dancing with Tai and Van. Some girl walked up behind Jackie and Shauna cleared her throat, looking at the liquor bottles behind the bar instead. Nat clocked it. "Want to go smoke for a second?"

"Yes please," Shauna said. They walked out back and sat on the curb smoking the joint that Nat had hidden in her bra.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but you're doing surprisingly well."

"Oh yeah? Sleeping from like 11 pm — 7pm is doing surprisingly well?"

"Well I feel like on the spectrum of your potential reactions… yeah. It's definitely on the better end." Shauna laughed and Nat handed her the joint and continued, "Seriously, though. I thought especially without any workouts or anything today you'd be crashing out."

Shauna sighed, "I think I'm just tired. I'm gonna want her forever, but it's been like just rejection after rejection. My whole life, really. Obviously the Jeff thing is on me, but even before that. It's all just felt like one big fucking 'no' and maybe I just need to… I don't know." Shauna didn't want to say the words move on. She really didn't want to fucking say it. Nat nodded, not needing her to explain. Shauna took a deep breath and Nat finished off the joint. They headed back inside and Shauna went to the bathroom. She opened the door and found Jackie's eyes staring at her in the mirrors by the sink. Shauna was frozen. All she could do was look at her. Jackie didn't move. She didn't say anything. It honestly felt like they weren't ever going to move from those spots. They were just… locked in place. Shauna took a sharp breath in and decided to break the silence.

"I'm sorry…" Jackie shook her head and Shauna stopped. She looked at Jackie's fucking body in that dress and started salivating. Words started spilling out before she could stop them. "You look…" She stopped herself, not wanting to say anything she'd regret. She just looked at her. Shauna never wanted Jackie to move. She looked so perfect in that dress at that moment. She tried to just memorize all of it. She never wanted to look away. Fuck it. Jackie deserved to know. "You look stunning, Jackie. You really do." Jackie's cheeks flushed and her eyes filled with tears. Maybe ignoring her wasn't the right move. Had she hurt her feelings? Jackie didn't say anything, and Shauna felt herself wanting to make a move that Jackie would probably turn away.

"I'll come back in a minute. You know… the rules or whatever." Jackie nodded and Shauna searched her eyes for a second before turning and walking back out to her spot at the bar. She took a deep breath and Nat squinted at her.

"That was quick…"

“Jackie’s in there. I’m gonna go in a minute.”

Lottie raised her eyebrows, “You can’t pee at the same time?”

“Apparently not,” Shauna said with a sigh. At that moment, Jackie walked past them and out of the bar. Shauna wanted with everything in her to follow her, but instead she looked at Lottie. “Could you?”

“Yeah. Of course.” Lottie got up and followed her out. Shauna rested her forehead on the bar top.

Nat’s hand rubbed her back and she laughed, “We can pretend that’s not gross… yeah.” Shauna laughed and picked her head back up. “You’re just doing what she asked you to.”

“No, I know.”

“You’re doing the right thing.” Shauna nodded and Van came running up, throwing her arms around Shauna’s shoulders from behind. She was trashed.

Shauna turned to look at her as she screamed in her ear, “Where’d they go?”

Tai laughed and Nat responded for her, “They’re outside.” Van charged off to the door and Tai looked at Shauna, seemingly for an explanation. It was kind of surprising.

“I think they just needed some air.” Tai nodded, looking unsure and then walked off to catch up to Van.

“I guess we’re headed home. Ready?” Nat asked. Shauna nodded and they walked out together. They packed themselves back in the car and Jackie just looked so sad. Shauna was fucking sad too. All she wanted to do was comfort her. She knew a hug or even just words would probably be too much, so she rested her head on Jackie’s shoulder and closed her eyes, enjoying the closeness no matter how bittersweet. Jackie’s shoulders untensed and she leaned in too, resting her cheek on Shauna’s forehead. The skin to skin contact could’ve made Shauna cry, so she just kept her eyes squeezed shut and tried to soak in the feeling. They got out of the car and into Lottie’s house and Jackie crashed theatrically onto the couch. Shauna smiled. She was so fucking cute. Shauna went to the bathroom to change into a pair of pajama pants and to wash her makeup off. When she came back into the living room it was just her and Jackie.

“Oh, fuck. Spend all night trying to respect the rules and this is what it turns into.” She started laughing, feeling the effects of the weed in her system.

“Did you smoke?” Jackie asked. Of course she would know.

“Yes. Definitely did.” Shauna responded with a smile. Jackie just looking at her was making her feel some things that she probably should’ve been avoiding.

“You weren’t drunk enough without it?” Jackie asked. She seemed concerned, which was kind of cute, but she also hadn’t really been paying much attention, because she had like nothing to drink all night.

“Baby, the only drinks I had were those two shots and a beer.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize…” Jackie said. Shauna cocked her head and watched her eyes flutter open and shut. It was cute. She was exhausted.

“I’m not that far from sober, Jax.” Jackie nodded and Shauna laughed softly. She still had her makeup, shoes, dress, and purse on. “What do you need?”

“Shoes, please.” Jackie said. Shauna knelt down at the end of the couch and unstrapped her heels. She gently took one shoe off, then the other. She grabbed Jackie’s feet and lightly massaged them, knowing her feet would be sore from the night. Wearing heels to the club was insane. Jackie fell asleep almost immediately and Shauna pulled a blanket over her, replacing the decorative throw pillow with the one Lottie had left downstairs for them to sleep with. Shauna smiled and kissed her gently on the cheek before walking down the basement steps and falling asleep on the old lumpy couch they kept in storage. This was hard, but if it was really what Jackie wanted, then Shauna was going to have to start actually trying.

Chapter 39

Shauna woke up like four hours later at 6:30 in the morning and got in her car to drive home. She didn't want to be around when Jackie woke up, and felt herself needing some kind of exercise. She went home and changed into work out clothes. Before she left, she peeked in on her mom, who should have just gotten home from work and decided to make some eggs and toast to leave on her nightstand. Shauna hated how alone her mom must have felt when she was at school. Did she ever eat? Did she ever sleep? Part of Shauna just wanted to call it and move home to take care of her, but that would be wasting the 3 semester's worth of tuition payments which would probably be worse. Shauna took her mom a plate, putting it in some tupperware to keep it warm until she woke up and made herself a toast and egg sandwich as she ran out the door. She ran to the gym, worked out and then took a detour to the soccer field. She laid down in the grass. It was still wet with morning dew. So many memories happened on this field, from actually playing to sneaking onto it to drink and kick a ball around late at night.

Shauna took a deep breath, trying to just make peace with how things used to be and how they had to be now. She knew that she wanted Jackie in her life. She knew that she couldn't do that without moving on. Maybe she needed to give Adam a real chance? If not him then maybe someone else? Either way she needed to at least try to move past it. She needed to try to be in a room with her without pushing her boundaries or crying.

When she got back to campus, she called Adam. It was the first time that she had ever reached out to him, which was something he didn't hesitate to mention.

"Wow I actually feel kind of honored that you reached out. Usually I have to run you down."

Shauna rolled her eyes, fighting a smile. "Yeah, yeah. I wanted to know if you would meet me at the bar tomorrow night."

"Are you asking me out?" Adam said teasingly.

"No. It's not a date. Just a drink."

Adam laughed, "Deal. I'll be there at like 9?"

"Yeah, cool. See you then." Shauna hung up the phone and sighed. She turned to see Nat standing in her doorway with her eyebrows raised.

"You seem super thrilled." Shauna laughed and she came to sit down on her bed.

"I am… making an effort." Nat nodded.

"And you wanna do that with Adam?"

She couldn't make an effort with Jackie, so yeah. Nat knew that. "Jackie has made it clear that efforts in that regard aren't going anywhere."

"I didn't mean Jackie. I just meant…"

Shauna laughed, realizing what this was. “Not Adam?”

Nat shrugged and made eye contact. Shauna could understand why it was weird for them to be hanging out. They didn’t exactly mesh. “He’s just kind of… boring, don’t you think?”

“He definitely is. He’s also really bad at writing and he’s got awful music taste.” Nat laughed.

“But you like him?”

Shauna laughed and rested her face in her hands. “I don’t actually think I do.” Nat threw her head back and laughed. Shauna knew she sounded ridiculous, but she didn’t feel like she was going to like anyone. “He makes me feel good about myself. He like… sees me and makes an effort without me having to ask. He values my opinions probably more than his own… I don’t know. I don’t have to tip toe with him. Whatever I want to do he just accepts like a fucking puppy.”

“Like a puppy is crazy, Shauna.”

“It’s like his feelings never get hurt. I basically tell him every time we hang out that I don’t want to date him and he just smiles and laughs and says okay. I don’t know. It’s like the opposite of emotionally taxing.”

“I guess I can see the appeal. He just never seems very you, I guess.”

“What seems like me, then?” Shauna asked, now kind of curious.

“Somebody as complicated as you are.” Shauna laughed and hit her on the arm. Nat continued with a smile, “I just think you need someone with some depth.”

“I probably do. Just not now. I don’t want someone right now. I just want easy and uncomplicated.”

Nat nodded and they sat in silence for a minute, “I’m proud of you.” Shauna looked up at her, feeling her eyes start to fill with tears. She hadn’t heard that in a LONG time. Nat shoved her over. “Oh, god can I take it back?” Shauna laughed.

“Thank you. I know I’m difficult.”

“Everybody’s difficult. At least you keep me on my toes.” Shauna laughed. They spent the night watching movies and eating popcorn. It was honestly kind of grounding. Shauna made an effort not to mention Jackie, and nobody else did either. She did pretty well, but the second Nat and Lottie went to bed Shauna was dialing the phone. It was late and she really thought she’d be home, but she wasn’t. Shauna sighed, trying not to think about what she would be doing instead. She laid down in bed, closing her eyes and just trying to be okay with it. Right as she thought she had gotten there the phone rang. Shauna shot up and answered it.

There was really only one person it could be. “Jackie?”

Jackie giggled over the phone and Shauna felt a smile tug at her lips. “Hmm. I like it when you know it’s me.”

Shauna couldn’t help but laugh. She was *so* drunk. “I like when I know it’s you too.”

Jackie giggled into the phone again, “You better.” Shauna smiled. She liked Jackie when she was drunk and flirty. It was cute.

“You’re drunk.”

“As fuck, yeah,” Jackie stated very simply. Shauna laughed again. She hesitated, though. Jackie had been very drunk a lot lately, and given her history… Shauna was kind of worried.

“Are you okay? You’ve been pretty drunk a lot lately…”

Jackie scoffed, “Oh, just when I need to be.” When she’s been with Shauna? Is that what she meant?

Shauna sighed, “Is it just a coincidence that it happens specifically when you’re around me?”

Jackie paused and responded quietly, “Probably not.” Shauna closed her eyes and took a deep breath. How was she still managing to hurt her just with her presence?

“So, what was the reason tonight?”

“Not a good one, probably.” Jackie sighed. What exactly did that mean? Shauna’s heart sank, feeling like she was about to get hurt again.

“Why don’t you tell me anyway?”

“You don’t want to know, Shauna.”

Well now that she had brought it up, Shauna absolutely did. “I do.”

“It’s going to hurt you, baby,” Jackie said. The baby was cruel. Shauna held her breath, trying not to be so easily fucking affected. It was one word, and Jackie didn’t even mean it like that. Shauna felt her throat swell and her eyes water. She knew it was bad. She knew it was going to fucking hurt. She didn’t even care anymore.

“Please, Jax? Tell me?” All Shauna could hear on the other line was breathing. Jackie seemed to be really fucking stressed about it. Shauna knew she had slept with someone. It felt like the only logical conclusion to draw.

“I slept with someone.” Shauna squeezed her eyes shut, tilting the phone away from her mouth so Jackie wouldn’t be able to hear her fucking crying. She exhaled and felt a few tears run down her face. She sighed and wiped them from her cheeks, collecting herself.

“That’s okay, I think.” It wasn’t, but who would she be to be upset about it?

“Really?” Jackie asked quietly. She asked it like she really didn’t believe it was.

Shauna took a deep breath. Fuck this was hard. “I mean… no. But I can’t really be mad. It happens. It’s just part of it.” She heard Jackie sniffle and exhale.

“Really?” She started to cry and it broke Shauna’s heart. At least it meant something to her.

“Jackie, babe. Please don’t cry. It’s okay, really.” Jackie didn’t slow down. Her sniffles turned to full on sobs. “I’ve slept with people too. It’s good for us.” Shauna heard Jackie

gasp and then inhale sharply. Fuck. That was not the right thing to say to make her feel better, apparently. Jackie stopped crying and now she just sounded fucking angry.

"People?"

"Well…" what was she supposed to say? She couldn't lie. Didn't she already confess to this in her voicemail? "Yeah." Shauna sighed. This was going to be bad. Her head started to throb.

"How many people?" So apparently she hadn't confessed to it. Great. Shauna thought they were past this and apparently Jackie didn't even know. This conversation was quickly moving to something that was beside the point.

Shauna tried to redirect them. "Jackie… Come on, now. I'm just saying it's okay. I get it."

"Yeah, I bet you do get it." It was mean. Jackie was the one that didn't want to have sex with her anymore. Jackie was the one who told her it might never happen.

Shauna tried to stay calm. "Hey. We're supposed to be friends, remember? Friends don't agree to never fuck anybody ever again."

"Yeah, actually. We are supposed to be friends, Shauna. Friends tell each other when they're dating someone. Friends tell each other when they've had sex with someone. Friends actually communicate with each other and don't make excuses when they omit the truth in a conversation." Jackie's voice gradually got louder and louder until she was screaming into the phone. This wasn't going to end until Shauna told her what she wanted to know, and fuck it honestly. If she wanted to know then fucking fine.

"Two. I have slept with two people this semester."

"Adam and who?"

Shauna sighed, "Jackie, I didn't do anything wrong. Why am I getting interrogated?"

"Just… please. I get it. I know I can't be mad at you, I just want to know." Shauna took a deep breath. Fine. Whatever.

"It was just some girl." Shauna considered telling her the girl's name, but something about telling Jackie Taylor that she slept with Taylor Jackson felt kind of humiliating. "I don't remember her name."

"Why'd you pick her?"

Shauna sighed again, feeling fucking frustrated and exhausted by this conversation. This was so fucking unfair, but if Jackie wanted it then Shauna wasn't gonna say no. "She reminded me of you, Jackie. I get that probably breaks a fucking rule or something but that's my fucking answer."

"And Adam?" This is what their friendship was going to be? What the fuck? Shauna rolled her eyes and answered.

"Because he doesn't remind me of you." Shauna didn't know if she had meant for it to come out with that degree of honesty, but it had and now Jackie was dead silent on the other

line.

"Got it. Good to know that warranted a second date." It was mean. Jackie was being fucking mean, and unfair, and hypocritical as fuck. She was done with this. She had tried to be nice and calm down the conversation, but it felt like Jackie was trying to piss her off. She decided to be mean back.

"A fifth, actually." Jackie's laugh sounded hollow and bitter and Shauna didn't even care. She's the one that wanted to know so fucking bad. "Since we're doing this… who did you sleep with?"

"A girl I met at the bar with Re. Charlie."

"Why?" Jackie took her time thinking about her answer and Shauna realized she didn't even want to fucking know. She wanted to be done with this goddamn conversation.

"Because it's simple. There aren't any rules, there aren't any lines I have to be careful not to come too close to. I can get what I need and I thought that I wouldn't have to feel like shit about it. But clearly that isn't working out." Shauna stifled a laugh. Seriously? Jackie wanted to call Shauna and bitch about the rules SHE FUCKING WANTED?

"Well I'm so fucking sorry about that, Jackie." They sat in silence for a while and Shauna half expected Jackie to hang up. She considered doing it herself, but really deep down she knew she'd rather be on the phone arguing with Jackie then not be talking to her at all.

Jackie took a deep breath and finally spoke, "So are you guys together?" she asked. Shauna finally exhaled.

She rolled her eyes as she answered, "No, Jackie. Fuck. He takes me out to dinner and sometimes we go to the bars. It's not a serious thing."

"But you like him?"

The words came out before she could think about them, "Yes, Jackie. I like the man I'm going on dates with." She knew she didn't mean it, but was she supposed to tell Jackie no? What the fuck was she supposed to say? What the fuck kind of question even was that?

"Goddamnit, Shauna. I'm just trying to talk to you about him. You don't have to be so fucking defensive all the time. Sometimes you can just offer up information, you know."

Yeah because when she offered up information earlier that had gone so fucking well. "Yeah, well it feels like a really welcoming environment for a conversation."

Jackie's voice turned bitter and cold again. "Fine, then. You don't want to talk about it, then fine. God fucking forbid I try to understand whatever the fuck is going on in your head." Jackie hung up the phone and Shauna slammed hers back down on the desk. This was so fucking unfair. *She* fucked somebody else, ran home to call Shauna drunk as hell to tell her about it, bitch about the rules SHE insisted on making, and then turned it around and got pissed at Shauna? Fuck that. Shauna stormed out of her room and ran to the 24 hour gym. She needed to work out her anger or she would never fucking sleep. Three hours later she got back to her room and turned off her alarm before crashing into her bed and falling asleep.

Chapter 40

Shauna woke up to her phone ringing. She sighed, remembering her conversation with Jackie. Now that she had worked out her anger, part of her kind of felt like shit. She probably should have told Jackie. She shouldn't have assumed that she had let it slip in the voicemail. If she wanted to be her friend then they needed to try to talk like friends would. She was just so fucking terrified to scare Jackie away or break her trust again. Shauna sat up and got out of bed, moving over to the phone. It was probably her mom calling to say hi or Adam to confirm their date. She was fucking exhausted, though. She just wanted to go back to sleep.

"Hello?"

"Hey…" It was Jackie. Shauna was actually kind of shocked she had called so soon. She kind of had expected the silent treatment.

"Jackie?"

"Yeah, hi." Shauna sat in silence for a minute, waiting to hear what she had to say. "I'm sorry that I got so upset." Shauna could hear the actual pain in Jackie's voice. She had been worried too. Shauna took a deep breath, knowing that she couldn't possibly be angry with her when she was talking like that.

"Please… don't be sorry. I get it. I wish I had told you stuff as it happened." Jackie didn't respond right away, taking a deep breath instead.

She cleared her throat, "Did you really not tell me because I made you feel like you couldn't?" It was so quiet that it was practically a whisper. Shauna's chest tightened at her obvious guilt over the situation.

"No. I know you would've tried to be supportive. It wasn't that… I'm just so scared to hurt you."

"Lying hurts me, Shauna," Jackie said a little too quickly. Of course, Shauna could've known she'd say that.

"I know."

"More than anything. It's the lying."

"Yeah…" Shauna said quietly, "I know." Why was this getting fucking harder? Shauna closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead.

"Do you love him?" Jackie asked. It sounded like she assumed Shauna would say yes. Was she fucking insane? Shauna wasn't ever going to love anybody but her. She kind of thought that was obvious.

"Jackie… of course not. I don't even know him."

Jackie exhaled. "I'm sorry, Shauna."

"Don't apologize, Jax. Really."

"Okay. I should probably go." Shauna nodded before realizing that Jackie couldn't see her.

"Okay. I love you, Jackie. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, me too. Love you too, Shipman." Shauna smiled as she heard the line disconnect. Maybe they could do this. Maybe they could actually figure out how to talk to each other.

The next few weeks, Shauna really did try with Adam. It was going well. They had gone out to dinner a few more times and gone to the movies once. Every time, Shauna made sure to tell Jackie about it. She wanted to know, so Shauna just wanted to be honest. It sucked, but Jackie didn't want her. She had to just let somebody else make her feel good. Adam made her feel big and important. He took her to see Good Will Hunting when he had been talking about Titanic for weeks. He would buy her Chinese food when he just wanted a burger. He started drinking rum because Shauna never had any vodka on hand. He was just… thoughtful. He made Shauna feel like she deserved to be thought of. As much as it hurt Jackie, Shauna didn't want to let that go. She had learned to really like Adam. It wasn't exactly romantic, and Shauna made sure to let him know they still weren't dating. Adam didn't care, and so Shauna didn't either.

With that being said, Shauna was more than excited to go home to Jackie. Lottie had an exam ridiculously late in the week, so Jackie and Van were crashing at her place alone for two days, which meant that as soon as they got to town Shauna would get to see her. She drove 85 the whole way. It was a little ridiculous, but nobody called her on it. They walked in and Lottie was pretty much attacked by Tai and Van, yelling for her opinion in their debate. Van screamed that Halloween was a classic and that it was disgraceful for Tai to even allude to Scream being better. Tai tried to scream over her and Lottie pulled them both into a hug. Shauna just watched the hug completely dissolve the argument. Lottie always seemed to have that effect.

Van scoffed, "Lottie, you peaceful little freak. This is so unfair." Shauna looked up at Jackie who was staring at her with a wide smile. She could already tell she was drunk. Jackie took two steps and practically tackled Shauna into a hug. She couldn't help but laugh. It was just so cute.

"Miss me?" Shauna asked.

Jackie let her go and looked up at her, "Always." Shauna smiled and watched her turn her sights on Nat.

"C'mon, Nat. You're up." Nat tried to look uninterested, but Shauna thought she saw a little smile creeping onto her face.

"Don't you dare fucking touch me, Taylor." Nat backed away and Jackie wrapped her up. Shauna laughed at the glare Nat sent her over her shoulder. Jackie let her go and turned to Lottie, practically jumping into her arms. She was so affectionate. Shauna couldn't take her eyes off of her.

"I see you guys didn't burn the place down… Thanks for that," Lottie joked.

“Oh it was no problem, but if you smell any burnt popcorn… Tai did it,” Jackie joked. Tai smacked Jackie’s arm and she smiled, glancing at Shauna and then turning and beelining for the kitchen. Shauna followed her, debating whether or not she should even make a drink. Jackie reached for the bottle of vodka on the counter and Shauna snatched it out of her grasp, grabbing her cup and making her drink for her.

Jackie gasped theatrically, “What a gentleman…” Shauna chuckled and smiled at her.

“So… you coming over for Christmakah?”

Jackie grinned and squinted at her, “You know, last time I got a formal invite.” Shauna laughed. “I should’ve known the chivalry was an act.”

Shauna smiled and rolled her eyes. “Oh, my mistake. Jackie Taylor…” Shauna set the vodka down and turned to give her her full attention. “This is me officially inviting you over to the house for our annual Christmakah dinner.” Jackie’s eyes lit up and her smile grew tenfold.

“Well in that case… I accept.” Shauna topped off Jackie’s drink and handed it over. She had something she had to say and she was a little nervous about it. It would 100% be breaking their rules, but it would be for her mom. She couldn’t just tell her no without at least bringing it up.

“So, there’s actually something I wanted to run by you.”

Jackie took a sip. “Okay… do I need to be worried?” Shauna shook her head. Not worried. Hopefully not worried.

“My mom managed to get Christmas and Christmas Eve off this year… so she wanted to do like a girl’s wine night on Christmas Eve. She really wants you there, and I didn’t really know how to tell her that it might not be a good idea.”

“Why wouldn’t it be a good idea? It sounds fun.” Shauna smiled. Was Jackie really just pretending that wouldn’t be an issue?

“We have these rules, you know.” Jackie rolled her eyes and Shauna smiled. At least they both hated them.

“Aren’t we breaking the rules right now? Look at us, alone in a room with alcohol and we’re doing fine.” Jackie wiggled her eyebrows at her and Shauna laughed.

“I’m not drunk, dear. Haven’t even taken a sip yet. We’re not breaking any rules.”

“Yet.” Jackie winked at her and Shauna’s eyes dropped to her lips. Did she want to break the rules? If it were up to Shauna she’d just get rid of them entirely, so if that’s what Jackie wanted… “Kidding! Sorry. It’s your mom Shauna. Of course I’ll spend Christmas Eve with you guys.”

Shauna took a deep breath, trying to refocus. “We’re gonna be drinking, Jax. I’m not gonna be able to drive you home. My mom would be weirded out if you didn’t stay in my room. She would know something was up. I just don’t want to put you… or us, I guess in a position you don’t want to be in.” Shauna wasn’t trying to talk her out of it, but it didn’t really seem like she understood what Shauna was saying.

Jackie took a second, looking down at the counter before responding. “I’ll sleep on the floor. We’ll figure it out. I’m not gonna disappoint your mom. I couldn’t. I’m excited to see her.” Shauna smiled softly at her and took a sip of her beer. Like she was going to let Jackie sleep on the floor.

“She’s excited to see you. I am too. I’ve missed you, you know,” Shauna said. Jackie smiled at her.

“You’re breaking the rules,” she said teasingly, pointing at Shauna’s cup. Shauna laughed and watched Jackie walk out of the kitchen. She really had missed her. Shauna hung out and finished her beer before deciding to head home. She still had all her stuff to unpack and she wanted to make breakfast for her mom before her 2 am shift. She said goodbye to everybody and made her way to her car. The night had been fun, actually. It had been kind of easy with Jackie. It was light and carefree. Maybe there was a little flirty banter but it didn’t crush Shauna to hear it. She made some overnight oats for her mom and left it in the fridge with a note on the counter before walking to her bedroom and finally crashing for the night.

The next morning, she got up and cleaned the house, hoping that her mom would just take a nap when she got home if she saw it was done. She went through her routine of running to the gym, working out, running a few laps on the track and then running home. It was fucking cold, but honestly it felt good on her lungs.

She got home and didn’t bother showering. She was gonna shower before Jackie got there anyway. Instead, she spent the day unpacking her things and picking out an outfit for the night. Her mom wanted it to be nice, and Shauna was a little excited for the opportunity to get all dressed up. She decided on blue linen pants and a white short sleeve shirt. Her mom got home with pizza at 4:30.

“Hey, momma!” Deb threw the pizza on the table and ran in to give her a hug.

“Oh, hey sweetie! I’m sorry I missed you this morning. Thank you for breakfast, though. That was really nice.”

Shauna nodded. “Yeah, of course. I had some free time so I cleaned up a little. Maybe you can get a quick nap in before we make the desserts?”

Deb smiled softly and rubbed Shauna’s arm. “You know I survive just fine when you’re not here, right?”

“No, I know. I just worry, you know?”

“Thank you honey, but I really am okay. I like my job. I like being able to send you to a nice school. I like being able to afford nice wine for nights like tonight. I promise I’m okay.”

Shauna nodded, “Okay. I still want you to take a nap, though.” Deb laughed and Shauna smiled at her, gently pushing her toward her bedroom.

“Okay, okay. The desserts are store bought, by the way. You must’ve forgotten who you live with while you were gone. I have a bag of groceries in the car. Would you mind bringing them inside?”

“Of course. Good night momma.” Deb waved and shut her door. Shauna laughed, shaking her head. She grabbed the wine and the desserts and brought them inside. She ate

her pizza, chilled the wine and plated the desserts. Around 6:30 she got in the shower, shaving, washing her hair, the whole deal. She was really excited to look all put together. She was also really excited to see Jackie look nice. Shauna put on the outfit she had picked out and put her hair into a tight low bun, pulling out two framing pieces. She put mascara and a little bit of eyeliner on and applied just the tiniest amount of lip gloss. She gave herself a once over and took a deep breath. She looked good. She looked really good. She walked downstairs and saw her mom running around the kitchen, even though Shauna had already done most of the work. Shauna stopped and watched. It was really sweet how hard she was working to make the holidays fun this year.

The knock at the door sent Shauna into a damn near sprint to answer it. She opened the door and smiled. Jackie was fucking beautiful. She looked so… adult. It was fucking insane. She had this dark lip gloss on that just encaptured Shauna's entire attention. She had silky green pants on and a black turtleneck that hugged her arms perfectly. She just looked so goddamn good. Maybe tonight was going to be harder than she thought. She got a hold of herself and realized she was probably supposed to be speaking or something. "You can just walk in, you know. You always used to." Jackie's eyes traveled up and down Shauna's body before landing on her eyes. Jackie smiled at her and pulled her into a hug. Her hair smelled fucking amazing and Shauna held on probably a little too long. When she finally released her, Shauna took a deep breath, forgetting what she was waiting for.

"Next time I will." Oh yeah. Knocking or whatever. Shauna stepped to the side and let Jackie through, trying not to stare at the way those pants hugged her ass when she walked away.

"Jackie Taylor!" Deb screamed from the kitchen. Shauna watched her run up to Jackie and wrap her in a hug. "I'm so glad you came! I thought we'd start the holidays off a little early."

Jackie smiled, "Seriously Ms. Shipman, it's good to be home. Thank you for thinking of me."

Deb pressed her hand against her chest and smiled wide. "Always, baby." She walked over and grabbed three wine glasses. Jackie was eyeing the desserts and Shauna knew she was ready to eat.

"Are we tearing into these?" Shauna asked. Jackie turned around to look at her and Shauna couldn't help but smile. She watched Jackie look her up and down and then force her eyes to the floor.

"Yes, yes," Deb said, turning to look at her. "Shauna honey, can you serve everything please?" Shauna nodded and squeezed past Jackie in their small kitchen, placing a hand on her lower back as she did it. Really, she was trying to be respectful so she didn't accidentally touch her ass or something, but Jackie looked at her like she didn't take it that way. Her eyes were dark and they were glued to Shauna's arms. Jesus Christ. Jackie followed her, grabbing plates and forks and helping her to serve the desserts. Deb grabbed the bottle of wine out of the fridge and poured three glasses. It was fun. It was easy. She put on some of her favorites, Motown or Rod Stewart and they danced, talked and laughed all night long. They really were just a little family. It was perfect, but it took less than an hour for them to run through the nice wine.

“Well, girls… this is why we can’t have nice things,” Deb said with a laugh. She walked to the fridge to grab her usual box wine and Shauna’s eyes ran over Jackie’s outfit again. She had pulled her sleeves up and made Shauna realize that she was probably way too attracted to her fucking forearms. She had curled her hair and it was falling perfectly on her shoulders. Jackie caught her looking and shot her a little grin as Deb walked back in the room to refill their glasses. Aside from their long stares at each other, they had been pretty much on their best behavior. It wasn’t weird or awkward. They were acting like they used to. They were being best friends. Deb suggested a movie around 10, and almost immediately passed out on her recliner. Shauna looked over at Jackie sitting next to her on the couch and laughed at the sound of her snoring quietly. She stood up and walked over to her mom, waking her up and walking her to her bedroom.

She set a glass of water on the night stand and Deb grabbed her arm. “I’m so proud of you for finding her again, honey.” Shauna smiled.

“It was inevitable, I think.” Deb’s hand cupped Shauna’s cheek.

“I think so too.” Shauna smiled and kissed her mom on the cheek, offering a quiet goodnight and shutting the door behind her. Shauna found Jackie washing the dishes in the kitchen.

“Hey, I was gonna do that. You didn’t have to.” Jackie finished drying the last of them and Shauna hopped up on the counter to talk as she did.

“No, it’s okay. Least I can do.” Shauna looked at her and saw nothing but those ridiculously mesmerizing eyes and her dark colored, glossy lips. Jesus Christ. Shauna wanted her eyes back on her. She wanted to feel that intensity that happened every time they made eye contact. She needed it like a fucking drug.

“Jackie?” She looked up quickly and her face went bright red. She inhaled quickly and looked down to grab her drink, took a long sip and then looked back at Shauna. She couldn’t help but smile at how nervous she looked. Jackie wanted her just as badly as Shauna did.

Jackie cleared her throat and held her eye contact, “Yeah?” She took another drink and started to put the dishes away.

“I’m sorry for asking you to break the rules.” Jackie didn’t look at her when she responded.

“You didn’t. Your mom did, and she doesn’t know about the rules.” Jackie reached up to put some plates away and Shauna’s eyes attached themselves to her ass and the little sliver of skin that was revealed any time she stretched too far. Suddenly, Shauna wished their cabinets were higher. Jackie turned back around and Shauna was caught. She figured if she was already busted she might as well take her time. Her eyes wandered slowly up Jackie’s body, taking in every curve and committing it to memory. She met her eyes and Jackie swallowed. She had been looking too. “I’ll make an exception to the rules for your mom anyday.” Jackie smiled and jumped up to sit on the opposite counter top.

“But not for me?” Shauna asked with a playful grin. Jackie didn’t take it that way.

She squinted at her and responded, “We made the rules together, remember?” Shauna nodded, looking away. Jackie didn’t want to do the whole playful banter thing. Got it.

Shauna downed the rest of her wine and jumped down to refill it. Jackie sighed and took another drink too. "Does your boyfriend know how little you like our rules?"

Shauna decided to ignore the boyfriend comment, knowing that denying it would lead their conversation somewhere more bitter than fun. "How do you know I don't like the rules?" she asked, cocking her head to the side and watching Jackie squirm. She liked it when Jackie looked like she had no idea what Shauna was going to do next.

She smiled at her and took another drink before answering the question, "You told me."

Shauna paused, trying to think back to when she would've said it. She hadn't. Not that she could remember anyway. That's when it dawned on her. "The voicemail?" Jackie nodded and Shauna sighed, taking a drink. "Apparently I said a lot of things on the voicemail."

Jackie's eyes got big and she looked away, which was a little concerning. "That you did." She finished her drink and handed it to Shauna to refill, which she did without hesitation.

"He's not my boyfriend," Shauna offered, knowing that she had to clarify it. Jackie rolled her eyes and Shauna shut the fridge, moving to stand in front of her. They were less than 6 inches apart now, and Shauna wanted to reach out and touch her with everything in her. Jackie reached for the glass and Shauna pulled it away, not loving the way she refused to believe her about Adam. Jackie looked down her body and Shauna watched her legs part a little bit. Shauna couldn't help but grin at the implication that Jackie was just as turned on by this whole exchange as she was. Shauna took a step forward and Jackie leaned back a bit. "He's not." Shauna locked her eyes on Jackie's and held the glass out for her. Jackie refused to look away as she grabbed it, letting their hands touch during the exchange. Shauna didn't back away. Jackie wanted this, didn't she? She was looking at her like she fucking wanted her, and Shauna was way too drunk to ignore her body language. If Jackie wanted her to buy the platonic facade she was putting on she was going to have to work a little harder. Shauna reached out, putting her hands on the sides of her thighs. She watched Jackie's face for any sign that she wanted her to stop, but it never came. Instead, she just gasped softly and leaned forward.

Shauna let her fingers glide over the soft fabric and move up to her hips, grabbing at them and holding them in her hands. Jackie moaned quietly and Shauna just about lost any composure she had left. Jackie wrapped her free hand around Shauna's neck, pulling her down into her chest. Shauna sighed into the added contact and let her hands move to Jackie's waist, feeling her body. Shauna wanted it so badly, but Jackie didn't. She had been telling her that for months now. Shauna refused to put herself in another situation where she could be rejected again. If Jackie wanted it as bad as Shauna did, Shauna couldn't be making every first move. She needed to stop herself before she got hurt again. Shauna dug her fingers into Jackie's sides and pushed herself back. It killed her. It absolutely fucking killed her, but she looked at Jackie and knew she had to. She couldn't keep cycling like she had been. She felt the tears start to build up and her face get hot. She released Jackie's hips and walked to the opposite counter, turning away from her and trying to stop herself from full on sobbing.

She heard the wine glass clink against the countertop and Jackie jump down from the counter. She heard her sigh and knew she had fucked up. Why did she keep doing this to herself?

"I'm sorry, Jax."

"No, don't be. Really. You didn't do anything wrong." Shauna took a deep breath and placed her head in her hands, shaking her head. It didn't feel like she did nothing wrong. Jackie reached out and touched her back, and Shauna felt her muscles relax at the touch. 'Hey,' Jackie said. Shauna lifted her head out of her hands, training her eyes back on the wall. Jackie reached at her jaw, pulling her face up to look at her, which wasn't really helping her self restraint issues. "We're just drunk. It's okay. Let's just go to bed, okay?" Shauna looked at her and she could tell she meant it. She nodded and dumped the rest of her wine, following Jackie up the stairs. Without a word, Jackie grabbed some clothes from her bag and disappeared into the bathroom. Shauna changed into pajamas and took a deep breath, grabbed some spare blankets and pillows off the bed and set herself up on the floor. She was making herself comfortable when Jackie walked back in wearing a sweatshirt and a pair of pajama pants.

"Hey… you don't have to do that. I can sleep on the floor."

Shauna rolled her eyes at Jackie. "I am not making you sleep on the floor, Jackie." Jackie held eye contact with Shauna, waiting for her to change her mind, but it wasn't going to happen. "Seriously, just get in bed. I'm good down here." Jackie nodded and got into her bed.

"You good if I turn this off?" Jackie asked, pointing to the light.

"Yeah, I'm good," Shauna answered. The lights went out and Shauna turned away from where she knew Jackie was sleeping. She really tried to sleep, but it just wasn't happening. She tossed and turned for hours, and just as she was about to go get a melatonin pill she heard Jackie's voice.

"Shauna?"

"Yeah?" she asked.

"Can you come to bed?" Shauna thought about it for a second. It felt like a bad idea. It felt like Jackie didn't even really mean it. 'Please?' Jackie said in a near whisper. That was all it took. Shauna carefully crawled into bed. She laid completely still next to her, making sure not to get too close or to touch her at all. She heard Jackie sigh and all of a sudden she had taken Shauna's hand and wrapped it around her stomach under her sweatshirt. Shauna pressed her face against the back of her neck. Her scent and their closeness in general was driving Shauna crazy. She tried to control her breathing, but it was like there was a hole in her lungs keeping her from ever catching her breath. Shauna pulled her closer, making their bodies flush. She fought the urge to kiss the back of Jackie's neck and sat there frozen until she could recover from the initial shock of the situation. Shauna slowly felt her shoulders fall and she buried her face into the side of Jackie's neck. She felt Jackie breath in and out happily. "Thank you."

Shauna nodded against her, "Good night, baby." Jackie hummed quietly and Shauna smiled, trying to breathe in her scent as discreetly as possible. It didn't take long before she was passed out in the deepest, most comfortable night's sleep she had in a long time.

Chapter 41

Shauna woke up alone in the bed. She looked first at the empty spot that Jackie had previously occupied, then at the clock on her nightstand. It was 2:15. She had really slept in. A cup of fresh coffee was sitting next to it, and Shauna happily took a few sips. She could hear the shower running and decided to just take her time getting up. She breathed in the scent of Jackie's hair on her pillow and closed her eyes. Sleeping next to her had made her feel happier and more secure than she had in years at this point. She had been living off of 5-6 hours of sleep per night MAX and now here she was getting close to 10. It was a fucking miracle, honestly.

She thought about last night, and how close she had come to really fucking everything up. She thought about the look on Jackie's face and how badly she had wanted her to. Part of her regretted it and part of her was proud of herself. It was hard to figure out which part to trust.

Jackie walked in completely ready for the day. She wore a high neck dark red sweater with a plaid skirt and her hair was perfectly straight. She looked beautiful. She smiled at Shauna when she walked in and she felt herself kind of freeze under her gaze. "Good morning," she said, never looking away from her.

Shauna looked her up and down completely unintentionally before answering, "You look nice."

Jackie blushed and Shauna's eyes clung to her legs where her skirt hemmed off. She looked good in it. Jackie blushed when she answered, "Thank you…" She looked away and she continued, "Your mom should be home any minute now. She left a note downstairs."

Shauna nodded, taking a sip of coffee. "Yeah she was volunteering." Deb had made a habit of volunteering on holidays when she could. She had always called it her Christmakah gift to the community. Shauna looked at her closet, trying to figure out what she was going to wear. "Want to help me pick out an outfit?"

Jackie looked at her and then at her closet like she was thinking about it before settling on her answer, "No, that's okay. Surprise me." Jackie said it with a smile and Shauna thought about how critical she used to be of her outfit choices in high school. She was trying to show her she's changed too. Shauna nodded at her with a smile and got out of bed to pick something out. She settled on a black turtleneck with a pair of straight leg jeans. She wore her hair natural with a little curl to it and walked downstairs to meet her mom and Jackie. Apparently her mom had woken up early that morning to make most of the food and she was starving when she got home, so they all agreed to eat kind of early.

Shauna limited herself to one glass of wine and Jackie stopped as soon as she noticed Shauna had. They ate more than they probably should have and sat together in a daze in the living room afterward. Jackie sat with her feet on Shauna's lap and Shauna had her feet rested on their coffee table. They made quiet conversation for a while until Deb's snoring drew Shauna's attention. She considered waking her and taking her to bed again, but selfishly she wanted the buffer around to stop her from doing anything she knew she shouldn't.

Instead, she looked at Jackie and whispered, “Wanna smoke?” Jackie nodded and they snuck out back. Shauna caught her staring intently as Shauna lit the joint. She tried to ignore the way her eyes darkened and her lips parted when she looked at her lips, but she was making it hard. Shauna hit it and watched Jackie’s eyelids flutter. She saw her exhale of hot breath in the cold air. It gave her away. Shauna cleared her throat and handed the joint over. Jackie took it and looked away.

“I’m really glad you’re here, Jax.” Jackie looked up at her and smiled.

“Me too.” Shauna watched her lips wrap around the paper, her eyes only being drawn back up when Jackie continued, “I was a little surprised to get the invite, honestly.” Shauna was confused. Had Thanksgiving really been that bad?

“What? Why?”

Jackie looked away, passing the joint back before answering. “I was just surprised you didn’t want your boyfriend here. I thought he’d probably be meeting your mom.” Shauna laughed and hit the joint. She looked at Jackie and saw she wasn’t joking. She rolled her eyes, because how many fucking times did she have to say it?

“God, Jax. We go on dates sometimes. It is not a relationship. We’re not dating. He’s definitely not going to meet my mom.” Shauna hit the joint again and watched Jackie’s little eye roll in response. She wants Shauna’s honesty but doesn’t ever fucking believe her anyway. Now she was getting pissed, because what? Jackie wouldn’t come at all if Adam had been invited? That didn’t feel very fucking friendly. “And even if he did get an invite, why would that mean you wouldn’t get one?” Jackie looked at her and Shauna tried to convey how ridiculous that would be with her eyes. Jackie finally gave in.

“I don’t know…”

“My mom would never allow that.” Shauna smiled at her own joke and Jackie rolled her eyes and laughed.

“Oh but not you. You’d be all about it, huh?”

Shauna sighed. “I hope I never have to spend another holiday without you, Jackie Taylor.” Jackie smiled and took a hit, drawing Shauna’s eyes to her fucking lips again. Maybe smoking together was a bad call.

“I hope so too,” Jackie said.

Jackie spent the next week pretty much splitting time between Lottie’s and Shauna’s. They decided that as long as Shauna’s mom was home, there was no real risk of them doing much. The plan was pretty much working. The tension was fucking crazy, but it was good to all be together again. It felt comfortable and familiar and Shauna could tell that Deb fucking loved having her around. As much as Shauna might’ve been struggling to fight her impulses, it was worth it.

A few days after Christmas, Lottie, Tai, Van, and Jackie were all hanging at Lot’s, and Nat came over to give them some space. They were sitting out back smoking when Nat finally asked. “So… am I allowed to ask how Christmakah went? Seems like it was better than Thanksgiving.”

"Yes. I am out of bed, I'm doing my workouts, I'm journaling. Better than Thanksgiving for sure."

"What happened?

"Nothing, really. I had no control of myself and then I controlled myself. We slept in the same bed, cuddled a little. Other than that nothing really."

Nat nodded her head and Shauna continued, "I don't know how she does it."

"Does what?"

"Acts like it's so easy. I just like… constantly want to put my hands on her. I can't look at her lips without feeling like my brain is splintering, not acting on anything, and she looks at mine like she wants them too, but it's like it's easy for her." Nat looked away, nodding suspiciously. Shauna knew that she knew something. "Okay just tell me if you can't hide it better than that."

Nat laughed, "It's not even really a thing. I didn't even hear Jackie's side or anything. I just overheard a phone call."

Shauna waited for her to continue but she didn't. "A phone call saying what?"

"Well I don't know exactly. It just seemed like she's having just as much trouble as you are." Nat wouldn't look at her. Was that seriously all she was gonna say?

"Dude. Are you seriously not gonna tell me what the fuck you heard?"

Nat laughed, mocking her, "Dude. Do you know that Lottie and Jackie would probably both fucking kill me?"

"I won't tell anybody. Come on. For my own knowledge. Please?"

"You're seriously not gonna let this go?" Shauna shook her head, knowing that she had won her over. She sighed and shook her head before continuing. 'She called Van Christmas morning to talk her down from going upstairs and breaking your rules. They were on the phone for like 15 minutes. I think you were asleep or something.' Shauna held her breath. Her mom had been gone. Fuck, why did she have to sleep in? Fuck. Nat laughed at her apprently very obvious reaction, "Aren't you like trying to follow the rules? You don't have to look so goddamn devastated."

Shauna laughed and rested her head in her hands, "Well fuck if she doesn't want to then why the fuck would I?" Nat laughed and Shauna ended up doing the same. They sat for a second and Shauna thought about it. Really, regardless what she was tempted to do, she chose to shower instead. If she really did want to break the rules she could've. "Seriously, though. I've decided I'm not gonna be the one to cross the line anymore. If she wants something different then she's gonna have to make that decision."

Nat nodded. "I think that's a pretty good mindset for all of it. As long as you're still living in the meantime."

Shauna sighed, "Unfortunately I'm not really banking on her getting there." Nat nodded and eventually changed the subject.

A few days later came New Year's Eve, and the group decided to spend it out at the bar. Shauna immediately volunteered to drive, knowing that her and Jackie drunk at a bar on New Years Eve would be a bad idea. If she was really making an effort, she needed to drive. Jackie wore this ridiculous fucking scoop neck tank top and a pair of tight leather pants. Shauna walked into Lottie's house and started fucking drooling over it. It was cruel. She managed to pull her eyes away and spent the pregame talking to Nat and Van. Shauna noticed that Jackie hadn't really been drinking, and while it was nice or whatever for her to make an effort in solidarity, Shauna offered to drive so that Jackie could have fun. She didn't mention it, though. It felt too early to be talking about their rules. She didn't want to ruin the mood.

Jackie rode shotgun, and for the first time since high school, poppy, preppy music played through Shauna's speakers. It was fun to watch her sing and dance and scream the lyrics to all the new songs Shauna didn't know she listened to. It was a lot of TLC, a lot of Spice Girls. It was fun.

They got the bar and Jackie planted herself at the bartop next to Shauna while everybody else made their way to the dance floor. Shauna laughed at her and tilted her head knowingly. "I offered to drive so you could have fun. You can drink, Jax." Jackie smiled at her, spreading heat across Shauna's face.

"Why wouldn't I be able to have fun if you were drinking?" Jackie asked, playing dumb with a teasing smile on her face.

"Well… the last time we both decided to drink it almost ended poorly," Shauna countered. Jackie knew exactly why.

"How do you think your boyfriend would feel knowing you're so easily swayed after a few drinks?" Shauna rolled her eyes, ready to lose it if she heard that word one more time. They were not together.

"Not my boyfriend." Shauna looked at the bartender and ordered two shots and a vodka cran. "C'mon, Jax. You've had like one drink. Seriously, my offer to drive is a total waste if you make yourself miserable too."

"You're miserable?" Jackie said with a little pout. Shauna chuckled. She was ridiculous.

She flashed Jackie a slightly flirty smile and answered, "How could I be? I'm with you." The bartender set her shots and her drink down in front of her. Jackie looked up at her with a raised eyebrow.

"I'll take this if you take the other one with me." Shauna scoffed. Why did she want her to drink so bad? So that she could tease her and then pull away the second it scared her again?

"I can't, I'm driving."

"It's one shot and we're gonna be here for at least three hours. Please?" Shauna hesitated and Jackie widened her eyes, giving her a little pouty lip. That was all it took. That was all it would probably ever take.

Shauna picked up the shot and Jackie beamed at her, raising her own glass before knocking it down together. Shauna slid her vodka cran over to her to use as a chaser and

Jackie thanked her. They looked together out at their friends. Being in their group made it a lot harder to not act like a couple. As the only ones who weren't together, they were often kind of pushed together to round out the group. "How's Van been?" Shauna asked.

Jackie sighed, "She's good. Working through it, you know? I think it helps that Tai's family took her in."

"Oh yeah, she did Christmas there, right?" Jackie nodded. "That's great. I'm happy for her."

"Yeah, me too. She needed it." Jackie took a drink and Shauna watched her. "A second family goes a long way when you need it." Jackie sent Shauna a soft smile.

Shauna looked down, feeling guilty. "I'm sorry I took yours away from you."

Jackie waved her off, "I think technically I removed myself." Shauna laughed. She was avoiding it, clearly. 'You never stopped being family.' Shauna nodded and they let that sit between them for a second. "Did you know your mom came to find me at graduation?"

Shauna smiled. "Yeah. I didn't ask her about it, but as soon as she found out your parents weren't there she practically sprinted off to find you." Jackie smiled. It looked like she wanted to say something but changed her mind.

"A second family goes a long way," was what she settled on. Shauna nodded, understanding what her mom really meant to Jackie. She didn't need to say it. They spent the next hour just talking. It was like nothing else existed, just Jackie and her stories and her gossip. Shauna could've listened to it all night long, but eventually her bladder won out. She went to the bathroom, and when she got back Tai and Van were chatting with Jackie, ordering more drinks. As she got closer, she could hear their conversation. It sounded like Tai was telling her to come dance and Jackie was resisting. Three shots sat in front of her and she heard Jackie's voice first, "Guys, last time we tried both being on the dance floor we fucked in the bathroom. That's kind of what we're avoiding." Shauna laughed and walked up behind her.

"And if I promise not to fuck you in the bathroom?" Jackie gasped and when she turned around to face her, her face had gone bright red.

Van started dying laughing and Tai pointed at her appreciatively. "See? You're good. Let's take our shots and then will you PLEASE go with us?" Jackie's eyes hadn't left Shauna's. She looked slightly mortified. Shauna chuckled again and nodded her head at the shots. Jackie should take them. She should go dance. It didn't look like she was sold, though.

"C'mon, Jax. Dance with me?" Jackie's eyebrows raised and she grabbed her shot glasses, downing one after the other and then grabbing Shauna's hand and pulling her toward the DJ. Shauna laughed at how eager she was. It was cute.

They started pressed against each other, but Shauna quickly learned Jackie couldn't handle that. She grabbed at Shauna's ass, and Shauna spun her around to redirect her. Jackie would turn and press her ass against Shauna, grabbing at her neck and pulling her closer, and Shauna would make her way back around, leaving more and more room between them as the night went on. Jackie was being a tease, and Shauna honestly fucking loved it, but she was also

kind of being mean. Regardless of anything else, Jackie was wasted and Shauna was sober. Nothing could happen. Shauna couldn't and wouldn't ever cross that line, no matter how dead set on it Jackie seemed to be. The further away Shauna kept her, the harder Jackie tried to grind their bodies together. She turned again to press her ass into Shauna and she nearly moaned at the feeling. She leaned in and whispered in Jackie's ear, "I promised I wouldn't fuck you, and if I let you grind your ass into me I'm gonna crack." Shauna felt Jackie's arms fall down from her face in shock and gently spun her back around. Jackie's eyes were dark and she could tell her words had probably the opposite of the intended affect. Shauna laughed and Jackie just grinned. The bar started the countdown at 20 seconds and they stood still, Jackie with her hands in Shauna's hair and Shauna with her arms wrapped around Jackie's lower back.

"Be my New Year's kiss?" Jackie asked. Shauna took a second to respond. It felt like a slippery slope.

"I don't know, Jax. You're drunk."

"As a friend…" Shauna was still hesitant. They both knew they were not capable of kissing as friends.

"It'll mean nothing. Just a friendly kiss." Jackie batted her eyelashes and delivered the line that she knew would get her what she wanted. "Are you really gonna make me kiss some random in a bar?" Shauna filled with jealousy and as people started to countdown from 3, she leaned in and kissed her. She couldn't threaten to kiss somebody else right in front of her, pout and then ask her to please kiss her. Shauna could've never said no to that. She really did try at first to keep it to a friendly kiss, just a quick little one. It became clear very quickly though, that Jackie had never wanted a friendly kiss. She grabbed the back of Shauna's head and deepened it. It was so perfect she could've cried. Shauna moaned and Jackie pulled her tighter with her arms, refusing to let her up for air. She tried to push her tongue into Shauna's mouth and Shauna felt her hands move under her shirt, grabbing at the skin on her hips and her back. She was completely fucking lost in it. She wanted Jackie to never stop fucking touching her. The rest of the world fell away and all that was left was her. Just her.

"Happy New Year!" The bar screamed out, bringing Shauna quickly back to reality and pulling them apart. Jackie looked up at her and Shauna knew that it was definitely a good thing that she was driving. The kiss was probably a bad idea, and Shauna had completely lost her mind about it. Fuck Adam. Seriously, fuck Adam, because he was *nothing* compared to her and Jackie's 'friendly' kiss. They didn't say another word to each other until she got them home safely. Lottie and Nat ran up to their bedroom and Tai and Jackie talked for a second.

Shauna was stressed. She felt like she had pushed a boundary or done something wrong because Jackie was drunk. She knew she needed to talk to her about it. Tai and Van ran upstairs and Shauna sat down next to Jackie on the couch.

"Jax… I feel like we shouldn't have done that," Shauna said once they were alone.

"It was a friendly kiss. It doesn't have to mean anything." Shauna knew it had meant fucking everything, to both of them. At this point, she knew that their kisses never meant nothing. Literally never.

"It didn't feel friendly… and you're drunk."

"I am not that drunk."

Shauna sighed, "Yes you absolutely are. You struggled getting into the car."

"I tripped!" Shauna tilted her head and Jackie ignored it, changing the subject. "So… what was friendlier, our New Year's kiss or your goodbye kiss with Adam before you left for break." Shauna shook her head. This was a bad conversation to have. Not when she was drunk.

"I am not going to engage in this conversation, Jackie. I didn't drink so that I could resist you for this exact reason.

"You told me I could ask you whatever I wanted." Shauna absolutely did not. She had offered that a year and half ago with Jeff, but not once since then.

"That was about Jeff. I don't remember offering that with Adam."

Jackie waved her off and continued her interrogation. "Do you like it better with a man?" Better than what? Women or Jackie? Nothing was ever better than Jackie.

Shauna shook her head, "It's not like that."

"Did you like it better with Jeff?"

"No." Shauna snapped her head to look at her, shocked by the question. She thought they were past this. "I didn't like it better with him, Jax."

"So… what do you like better? Sex with Jeff or sex with Adam?" Shauna shook her head. She knew Jackie was trying to piss her off. For whatever reason, she had decided to get her to lose her shit tonight, apparently. 'Does he make you cum?' Shauna's head snapped up at her. She squinted at her and she had to stop herself from responding too quickly. What a fucking crazy question to ask, though. Jackie wasn't willing to do it anymore, so what business of hers was it? Shauna took a deep breath and just sat there looking at her. Jackie tried again, "No, come on. This is fun. Let's see. What about the girl? Where does she rank?"

"You know what? If you still want to know all this in the morning I will tell you whatever you want. If tomorrow, you think this is the best thing for our friendship, I promise I will answer whatever questions you have."

Jackie held out her pinky, "Promise?" Even when she was being annoying she was cute.

Shauna smiled a little and interlocked pinkies, "Promise." Jackie took a deep breath and layed down, resting her head on Shauna's lap. Shauna sighed and ran her hands through Jackie's hair until she fell asleep. It didn't take very long at all. Shauna sat there for a while, debating on whether or not she should go sleep on the couch downstairs. Jackie just looked so comfortable. She couldn't possibly wake her up just to leave her. They had already done this once and now they weren't even in a bed behind closed doors. They were out in the open, not that that had stopped them last summer, but that was beside the point. Jackie wrapped her arms around Shauna's waist and that pretty much sealed the deal. Shauna gently laid herself down, careful not to wake Jackie and fell asleep with her fingers still tangled in the girl's hair.

Chapter 42

The next morning, Jackie gently shook her awake. Shauna opened her eyes to Jackie's smile and her bright eyes and she couldn't help the smile that covered her face. "Hey… Wanna get coffee?" She was whispering, so it must have been early. Shauna smoothed her hair out and tucked it behind her ear before stretching her legs out straight underneath Jackie and her arms up over her head. Jackie's eyes locked on her thighs and Shauna laughed. She was glad Jackie liked them so much. Jackie realized what she had been doing and she let go of Shauna's waist. Apparently she hadn't let go of it all night. She stood up and Shauna watched her walk to the laundry room before coming back with clothes for them to change into. She tossed Shauna a pair of shorts and a crewneck and walked up the stairs to change herself. Shauna put the shorts on and realized how much she had grown. Her and Jackie used to be able to share clothes, but Shauna's ass and thighs were ready to bust the damn seams now. Jackie came back down the stairs staring again, and Shauna realized it might have actually been intentional. She knew Jackie had to have had a pair of sweats somewhere in this house.

They drove to the local coffee shop and Shauna ran in to get their regular orders before heading back to the car to drink them. They sat for a second without saying anything. It was a little tense and a little awkward. Shauna figured she'd just start the conversation.

"Do you remember much of last night?" Shauna asked, smiling a little.

"Yes. I remember all of it," Jackie said with a little attitude.

Shauna raised her eyebrows, "Really?"

"Yeah, Shipman. Some of us can handle our liquor. I was drunk, not blackout." Shauna laughed. "You could've answered my questions," Jackie said with an eye roll. Shauna was shocked that one: she remembered, and two: she stood by it. That was crazy.

"Yeah? You still wanna know?"

"Yes, but no." Shauna looked at her, trying to figure out if she was supposed to offer information up. That didn't sound like a good idea.

"You can ask me whatever you want to, Jax. I'm not gonna lie to you."

"Friends tell friends this stuff, right? I mean, I used to tell you everything about Jeff." Shauna nodded her head because, sure. That hadn't been exactly enjoyable for her, and it also didn't end even remotely well, but it seemed like Jackie was willing to ignore that. "Do you like it better with men?"

"Not necessarily. I mean, it's just different. I don't know… it's hard to explain." She was pretty sure she just liked it better with Jackie. The men weren't the problem, Shauna's inability to ever let go was. Not that she could actually say that.

"Try?" Jackie asked. She could try. It would be awkward, but she could try.

Shauna took a deep breath, “Obviously there are just different parts, but with men it’s almost too easy. Like…” Shauna was hesitant to keep talking. She really wasn’t sure this was a good idea, and she wasn’t exactly thrilled to tell Jackie that Adam didn’t make her cum. It was at least a little embarassing, but she said she’d tell her what she wanted to know. She wasn’t gonna fall short on her promise now. Jackie nodded, giving Shauna permission to continue, “It’s good. Like… it feels fuller, I guess. But it just isn’t the same. It feels good but it’s hard to…” Shauna looked up at Jackie, feeling the need to be kind of cautious before just going for it, “to get there, you know?”

“He doesn’t… he can’t make you cum?” Jackie locked eyes with her and Shauna blushed a little. Yeah, this was kind of embarrassing.

“Well it’s not like it feels bad. I still feel good, I just don’t cum every time.”

Jackie looked confused. Her eyebrows furrowed and her she searched Shauna’s face for some kind of explanation. “But he does? Every time?” Shauna half shrugged, half nodded and Jackie looked like she was looking straight through her, thinking about something entirely different now. Shauna wondered where she went. A couple seconds passed before she spoke up again, “Shauna?”

“Yeah?”

“If you could choose between Jeff in high school and Adam now…” Shauna looked at her and sighed. That was an impossible fucking question.

“It’s just different, Jax,” Jackie tilted her head, silently asking her to answer the question. “I just feel like… look, Jackie. He’s not you. Do you really want me to answer that question?”

“I won’t get mad. I’m over the Jeff stuff, okay? Please.” It didn’t seem like a good idea, but whatever. They were trying, right?

Shauna took a deep breath and continued, “The sex with Jeff was good because it was the closest I could get to sex with you. I got off with Jeff every time, but I was… I was thinking about you. That being said, I hurt you by doing that, and I hated myself for it. I wouldn’t hurt you again.”

“But let’s say I wouldn’t get hurt. Purely a hypothetical.” Shauna sighed, pushing her head back into the headrest. Who the fuck knows, honestly. Jeff made her cum, but really it hadn’t been Jeff at all, it had been Jackie, and in that case her fucking picture did the trick with Adam anyway. Adam definitely lasted longer. Shauna sighed.

“I don’t know, Jax. I would never get with him now. But me in high school… how things were in high school… I don’t know.”

Jackie must’ve sensed her anxiety beacuse she shook her head and looked away. “I’m sorry… for the interrogation and for getting drunk and kissing you. I don’t mean to stress you out.” Shauna didn’t want Jackie to ever apologize for kissing her, but she couldn’t say that.

Shauna laughed, “It’s okay. You’ve been stressing me out my whole life, I don’t see it as a bad thing,” They made eye contact and Shauna smiled at her. ‘Can I ask you something now?’ Jackie nodded and Shauna considered. Did she even really want to know the answer to her own question? No, but yes. “This girl you’ve been hooking up with… Do you like

it?" Jackie looked away and hesitated before nodding. Shauna's heart felt like pin after pin was just being stuck in it. She was just waiting for it to fucking burst.

"Yeah. I do."

"And she…" Shauna paused. Did she want to know if this girl made Jackie cum every time? Did she even have to say it? Jackie's reaction to her sex life was probably answer enough. Jackie smiled and it fucking killed her.

"Yeah. She does."

Shauna swallowed and looked away, "Oh… okay. So are you guys like… dating or—"

"Oh, no. No. It's not like that. We get drunk at the bar together. That's the closest to a date we get." Shauna nodded.

"So, it's just like a casual thing? Hookups?"

"Yeah, it's like… stress relief." Shauna didn't believe it. Anybody that was that close to her had to have wanted her to themselves. She couldn't imagine it going any other way. It's fucking Jackie Taylor. "She just got out of a long relationship. I'm willing to bet they get back together. Kind of rooting for them, honestly. We're just each other's in between person, I think. Stress relief." In between person? Did that mean that she was actually trying to move on? She was in between Shauna and… her wife? Fuck. She felt a pit forming in her stomach.

"So you're in between, then?" Jackie looked away.

"I don't know. Maybe dating just isn't for me." Would that be too much to ask for? Shauna would be fucking thrilled to learn Jackie never wanted to date anybody ever again. Then at least it wouldn't be her fault. That would mean that she didn't want to be with Shauna because she wasn't a relationship person… not because she didn't want her. The girls sat in silence finishing their coffee. Shauna's head was racing. She knew this whole moving on thing would be hard, but it sounds like this Charlie girl was plenty capable of replacing her. That kind of stung. "She's not you, Shauna." Shauna's head snapped up at her, but she didn't say another word. If that was true, then why not just be with her? Why did they need to do this at all? After a few minutes, Shauna put the car in drive.

"Do you wanna go to the field? I still have a ball in my trunk." She felt like she could use a run, but she didn't want Jackie to leave yet. Jackie smiled at her and nodded, and Shauna had them there in a few minutes. They played in the snow long enough for Shauna to probably get sick in the little shorts Jackie had given her, but she didn't care. She genuinely had the most fun she had in a long time just messing around with her. It kind of made sense, honestly. It seemed like she only ever really had fun when Jackie was around.

They all said their goodbyes at Lottie's and made plans to meet up in Providence for spring break. It was definitely something to look forward to. The drive back to campus quickly turned into an investigation. "You guys made out at the bar, passed out on the couch on top of each other (because I saw that, yeah), and then when I woke up turns out you both had left and were together at your house?" Nat looked at Lottie for some help, and she just laughed and nodded, "And I'm supposed to believe that nothing happened?"

Shauna smiled, "Nothing happened. I don't know what to tell you. My mom was home."

“You guys didn’t fuck once?” Nat continued.

Shauna shook her head and Lottie chimed in, “I’m not sure how much that little head shake is worth anymore, Shipman.” Nat looked at her confused, and Shauna couldn’t blame her. She was confused too. Lottie turned to Nat, ‘Did you know she fucking lied to us all summer?’ Shauna laughed and turned to Nat. She was probably about to be in some trouble. Lottie saw the look on her face and her jaw dropped. “I was the only one that didn’t know?!” she screamed.

“Jackie made me swear you wouldn’t find out! She didn’t want you guys to be disappointed in her. Personally, I don’t really care as much. I pretty much act on things at peace with whatever disappointment may come of it, but I didn’t want to rat her out.”

Lottie gasped exaggeratedly, “Wow. You’re all just a bunch of liars.”

Nat narrowed her eyes, “You’re telling me that if you knew they were sneaking away all summer to fuck you truly believe you would’ve been able to withhold one of those knowing looks?” Lottie rolled her eyes because she knew they were right. She’s only capable of keeping secrets that could hurt someone. If she’s happy about it, she struggles to remember why it was a secret in the first place.

Shauna laughed, “Don’t yell at me, yell at Jackie. She’s the one that was so embarrassed of it.”

Lottie gave her a side eye before dropping it, prioritizing getting the details now. “So how often are we talking? Like a couple times or what?”

Shauna made eye contact in the rearview mirror. “Probably like three times a week.” Lottie gasped.

“Oh my god. How the fuck did no one know?”

Nat laughed and jumped in smuggly, “Well actually I knew. But that’s irrelevant. Continue.” Lottie laughed and kneed the back of her seat.

Shauna shrugged, “We were careful. We’d go out and y’all would go upstairs and take the bedrooms… we were left alone. And then she’d call when Van made other plans and I’d go over there. She was just embarrassed that we didn’t talk about anything. She knew Tai and Van would kill her.”

Lottie shook her head and laughed, “They probably would’ve. So then you went back to campus and what? Now you’re just… friends?”

Shauna sighed, “Trying to be. We are not very good at it.”

Lottie shrugged, “I mean if you didn’t fuck her after she tried to eat your face at the bar then I’d say you’re doing pretty good.”

“Maybe. Her sleeping with somebody new kind of kills me, but it’s better than life without her.”

Lottie cocked her head to the side, “You’re sleeping with somebody new.”

“Yeah but I don’t really like it. She does.” Nat threw her head back and laughed and Lottie just shook her head.

“Maybe you should just have sex with somebody you like,” Nat said.

“Like who?” Shauna asked. The car went quiet. Shauna didn’t like fucking anybody and they all knew that.

“Okay well you could try to find somebody,” Lottie said.

Shauna shook her head, cutting her off. “I don’t need it. I’ll get there eventually, but not now.” They dropped it after that and spent the rest of their drive talking about literally anything else.

When they got back to campus, the first thing Shauna did was go to the gym. When she got home, she called Jackie.

She answered with a little chuckle, “Miss me already Shipman?” Shauna felt a little relieved that Jackie knew it was her. It meant that Charlie girl wasn’t calling very often.

“Of course I do,” Shauna said, feeling a smile spread across her face.

“What’s your plan tonight? Meeting up with Adam?” Shauna could hear her tone shift at his name.

“Um… I’m not really sure. I haven’t talked to him. I should probably get a jump start on some reading assignments.”

“You know, you’re actually allowed to wait until classes start to do the homework.”

Shauna laughed and rolled her eyes. “If I put everything off until it was officially assigned I’d never have time for these phone calls.”

Jackie laughed, “How sweet.”

“What about you? Meeting up with Charlie?”

“Yeah, actually.” Oh, so she knew it was Shauna because she had already talked to Charlie. That made sense. She tried not to think about it. “She’s coming by in a couple hours.” Shauna nodded, not really sure how to respond to that. In a couple hours Jackie would be fucking someone else, and she was just gonna sit there 4 hours away knowing it was happening. Jackie cleared her throat and Shauna realized she hadn’t responded yet.

“That’s good. That’ll be fun.”

“So I think Tai, Van and Lot are gonna drive down here in a couple weeks.”

Shauna was grateful for the change in conversation. “Oh, nice.”

“Yeah. I just didn’t want you to think I was being weird not inviting you and Nat. We just don’t really have the space here for it.”

“Oh, no. It’s okay, really. I get it.”

Jackie exhaled and Shauna could hear her smile through the phone. “Good. I just didn’t want to hurt your feelings or anything.”

Shauna smiled. She seemed nervous about it. At least she cared. "Jax, take a deep breath. You're allowed to hang out with just your friends."

"Well… you're my friend too." Oh, yeah. She was. Shauna had forgotten that she was supposed to be just as much her friend as Tai and Van were. They both knew that wasn't the case, though.

"You guys have your little group. Really, it's okay."

They sat in silence for a minute before Jackie spoke again. "I really miss you. Which is dumb. I literally saw you this morning." Shauna smiled, glad that it went both ways.

"I really miss you too." There was nothing more to say, and Shauna knew she couldn't just sit there any longer. 'Alright well I'll let you get ready or whatever.' Jackie didn't say anything so Shauna choked out the next sentence, "Have fun tonight." Jackie laughed awkwardly.

"Thanks. You too." Shauna hung up the phone and took a deep breath. That was never going to get easier.

The next day, Adam took her out for dinner and a drink. They were at this quiet little tavern not far from campus. It was comfortable. They sat down and Shauna ordered a burger and a beer. "How was your Christmas? Did you have any family over?" Adam asked.

"Um, we actually do like a combination holiday. My mom calls it Christmakah."

Adam's eyebrows raised and he smiled, "Really? That sounds fun. Where'd that come from?" Shauna thought about it and realized that she had never told Adam about her dad leaving or anything. She didn't really feel like being vulnerable.

"Oh, you know. Just 14 year old me trying to be different and scaring the fuck out of my very Jewish, but also very supportive family. We came up with a compromise."

"And it just stuck?"

"Yeah. Still around even after I gave up on Catholicism."

"It's always good to have traditions, though." They sat in silence and Shauna realized she was probably supposed to ask about his.

"How was yours? What'd you do?"

"My family throws a big thing. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. The whole deal. It was… overstimulating."

Shauna laughed. She couldn't imagine anything other than her tiny little family dinners. It was nice when it didn't have to be a production. "That sounds a little overwhelming, yeah."

Adam nodded and smiled. "It's good, though. I try to check myself. I know I probably sound ungrateful." Shauna really didn't think so, but now he kind of sounded like he thought Shauna was somehow less fortunate because of her lack of family. She looked up and squinted at him, because what exactly did he mean by that? He didn't react and she let it go. The rest of dinner went well. Shauna couldn't get Jackie's plans to hook up with Charlie on the first fucking night back out of her head, so she invited Adam upstairs. He went to the

bathroom and Shauna turned Jackie's picture away from the bed. She was determined to cum without it. 30 minutes later, she gave up. She was essentially just edging him for no reason, trying to get herself off. She rubbed her clit, she rode it, she took it from behind. Nothing fucking worked, and he just seemed oblivious. When he left, Shauna turned the picture back around and used that instead. It took her less than a fucking minute. What the fuck was wrong with her?

She got out of the shower when Nat got home from work and she thought about asking her about it, but she already thought Shauna was dumb for sleeping with a man she didn't like. She couldn't imagine her reaction when she told her that the sex was also bad. Maybe sex with men was just like that. Who the fuck knows.

The next few weeks went by and Shauna grew closer to Adam. They hung out almost every day, and he was constantly in her room. It just started to feel more comfortable. The sex got a little better. She was able to cum every once in a while if everything lined up right, but it still wasn't exactly romantic. They just weren't talking about it. As long as he wasn't asking her for commitment then Shauna was kind of loving it. He hyped her up, he comforted her on bad days. Emotionally, it was just so secure. Shauna had never really had that before.

Lottie left for her trip to Rutgers, and Shauna couldn't help but feel a little jealous. She knew it was good for Jackie to have her individual hang outs with her friends, and she knew it was hard for them to all be so far away when she was at school. It just kind of sucked. How much work did she have to put in to be invited as her friend again? Nat had to work, and Shauna wasn't really in the mood to hang out with Adam so she just stayed in. She went to the gym, ran the long way home and then sat down at her desk to do some homework.

She was kind of shocked when the phone rang at 1 am. Jackie wouldn't be home so early. "Hey, it's Shauna."

"Hey. It's me," Jackie's voice made Shauna sit up a little straighter in her chair.

"Oh, Jackie. I didn't think you'd be back so early."

"It's like 1 in the morning." Jackie laughed. She was usually back at like 3.

"That's early for you. How's the visit?"

"It's good. I miss you though." Shauna smiled and let that sink in a little. It was nice of her to say, because she had been feeling a little left out.

"I miss you too, Jax. What'd you end up doing tonight?"

"Well apparently this whole thing was a trap. They wanted to meet Charlie, so we went to the bar." Oh. Charlie. Charlie was meeting her friends. Okay.

"Oh, that's fun," Shauna said with what she thought was pretty convincing enthusiasm. "How are things with her?" She wasn't sure if she wanted to know, but it felt polite to ask.

"They're okay. We've gone out to dinner a few times. I don't know. I feel like I could get a call tomorrow that she got back with her ex. I don't think I'm really that into it." Shauna breathed a sigh of relief. Thank god, honestly.

"Well, I'd love to say it sucks to hear that but…" Shauna said.

“Yeah, I know.” Jackie laughed. “I should probably go, I was just missing you so I thought I’d call.”

“I’m glad you did, Jax. Have fun this weekend.”

“Bye, Shipman.”

The next night, her and Adam went to Nat’s bar to get a drink. It was a live music night and they were doing some polaroid thing where everyone who walks in has to take a picture and pin it on the wall. It was actually a lot of fun. They danced and drank and laughed. Nat had to work, but she joined them when she could. At the end of the night, they sat with her as she closed down the bar. Shauna had made a habit of helping her sweep and wipe tables down and then walking back with her when she could. Adam volunteered to help out too, which Shauna thought was kind of sweet. At the end of the night, Nat took out the polaroid and started playing around with it. She took pictures of the three of them, her and Shauna and then some very coupley looking pictures of Shauna and Adam. She wasn’t sure how to feel about them, but she brought them home anyway. Adam walked her upstairs and looked through the pictures, grabbing a few to keep. He kissed her goodbye and walked home, leaving just her and Nat in the living room. Nat filled two cups with water and handed one to Shauna, which she took gratefully. Nat headed to the shower and Shauna took her pictures into her room. She looked at the picture of Jackie on her nightstand. Maybe it was time that Adam joined her. It only felt fair, honestly. He had been there every day since break. Shauna could at least start acknowledging him in her room.

She grabbed an old frame she had tucked away and taped the picture of them together at the bar inside it. She set the frame down next to the picture of Jackie with a sigh. It didn’t feel right. None of this fucking felt right, but Jackie was dating this Charlie girl, and Shauna knew that Jackie was never going to want a relationship with her. If it was going to happen, she felt like it would’ve already.

Chapter 43

Shauna spent the days leading up to spring break damn near giddy. The day everybody was supposed to get there she had woken up at 4:30, unable to fall back to sleep. She ran to the gym and worked out some of her energy before running home. Nat was making breakfast in the kitchen and put some on a plate for Shauna when she saw her.

"Hey. How are you doing today?"

Shauna answered trough heavy breathing, "Good, yeah. I'm excited." Nat raised her eyebrows.

"Is Adam staying in town?" Shauna nodded, taking a bite of her eggs. "Are you gonna… you know introduce everybody?"

Shauna's head shot up. Why would that be a good idea? "What? No. Why?"

Nat squinted at her and laughed, "You hang out with him almost every day and now you're just gonna avoid him for four days?"

Shauna looked around, wondering why that was so bad. "It's not really avoiding. I told him everybody would be in town and I'd be hanging out with my friends."

Nat seemed kind of amused by this conversation. "So let's say by chance they run into each other. Then what?"

"Then I introduce them. I'm not gonna do it on purpose, though."

"Does Adam even know you're gay?" Shauna took another bite of her breakfast, looking down at her plate as she did it. She had not mentioned that, no. Nat laughed. "Are you serious? He knows nothing about Jackie at all?"

"No, no. He knows about her. He just doesn't know that we had sex or anything." Nat raised her eyebrows and then let out her breath and went back to her breakfast.

"Let's just pray they don't run into each other. That's insane, Shauna." It didn't feel insane. As far as Adam needed to know, they were friends. They're friends now, so why would he need to know anything more? So that he could just be weird about it? No thank you.

Later that day, Jackie walked through the door and Shauna practically jumped into her arms. Jackie squealed and held her tighter than she ever had before. Shauna breathed in her scent and let the feeling of their skin to skin contact sink in. When she let go, she turned to Van and gave her a hug and then was surprised that Tai opened her arms for a hug too. It felt a big step with such a small gesture. The timing of the day was a little weird because Lottie had an exam to take and Nat had to get to work, so they all rushed to the diner that Shauna had ended up at on her first not date with Adam. They caught up, ate, laughed and then rushed home so that Nat could get to her shift on time. Shauna had done a pretty good job not letting her eyes wander or not initiating unnecessary contact. She reminded herself that she

knew what Jackie looked like. She knew what she looked like in every possible outfit and every hairstyle. She didn't need to stare.

When they got back, Nat went to work and Lottie left to take her exam. It was awkward for like 30 seconds, just Tai, Van, Jackie and Shauna. It didn't last long, though. Van insisted that they just needed to shower because they 'probably smelled bad or something', which was a ridiculous way of saying they were sneaking away to fuck in the shower. Shauna didn't mind the alone time with Jackie, though. They disappeared and Jackie turned to her expectantly. "So… you gonna give me the tour or what?"

Shauna laughed. It wouldn't be much of a tour. They had like four rooms. "Yeah of course. So much to see." Shauna moved to the front door and pointed around her apartment. "Kitchen, laundry room, closet, bathroom." She turned and watched Jackie look around at all of it. Her eyes were all lit up and she seemed so happy.

"Very nice, very nice." Shauna walked over to Nat and Lottie's room and pointed at the closed door.

"This is Lottie and Nat's room," she said before making her way down her small hallway, "And this is mine." She pushed the door open and let Jackie walk through it. She looked around and laughed softly.

"This is exactly what I expected." Shauna fought the urge to ask her why she had been trying to envision her bedroom. Something about that didn't seem exactly friendly. Instead, she watched Jackie's eyes skim over the pictures on the wall. Shauna didn't realize until then how many pictures there were of her. It was a little much, honestly.

"Sorry. Looking at it all now it's kind of like a shrine," Shauna said with a laugh.

"No, no." Jackie waved her off, eyes never leaving her pictures. "Nothing wrong with being worshipped," she joked. Shauna laughed. She definitely was.

"That you are, Jax. That you are." Jackie turned and smiled at her, and Shauna couldn't help but smile back. God, she had missed this girl.

"I've missed you, Shipman." Jackie turned back around to look through the books on her desk and Shauna walked over to her, wrapping her arms over her shoulders and looking at whatever she was over her shoulder.

"I missed you too." Jackie squeezed her forearm and she let her go. She turned to sit on her bed and Shauna watched the smile melt off her face as she stared at her nightstand. She had forgotten about the picture of him. Fuck. Shauna sat down next to her and watched her just stare at the picture frame.

"Jax…"

"You failed to mention that you had two pictures on your nightstand…" she sounded genuinely devastated and it felt like somebody had sliced into Shauna's heart.

"I probably didn't at the time. I don't know." She really wasn't sure how to handle this conversation. She didn't want to hurt Jackie, but she didn't want to be dishonest either.

"So it's kind of serious then I guess." Jackie couldn't meet Shauna's eyes. She didn't want to lie or to underplay it. They weren't dating, but they spent a lot of time together.

What was she supposed to say?

"I don't know. We haven't like talked about it."

"You've been together for a couple months now, right?" Jackie's eyes were still trained on the floor and Shauna started to panic. She really didn't want to hurt her, but wasn't this what she wanted?

"I guess so. Jackie, please don't be upset." Shauna put her hand on Jackie's thigh and Jackie jumped up at the touch.

"I'm sure Adam wouldn't be a fan of that, Shauna." Shauna's chest tightened and she hung her head, pulling her hand back. Jackie stared straight ahead, refusing to look at her.

"I never meant to hurt you."

"You didn't hurt me. I'm your friend. Why would I be upset about you being with someone. Really, I'm happy for you." Jackie turned and started to walk out the door.

"Jackie, wait." Shauna reached to grab her hand but thought twice. She hadn't been too excited about the physical touch a couple minutes ago.

"Sorry, just need some air." Jackie still hadn't looked at her, and she walked out the front door without another word. Shauna just watched her go. What was she supposed to do? Run after her and tell her that she loved her way more than she ever would Adam? So that Jackie could sigh and push her away, telling her the rules were there for a reason? There was nothing to say. It was just going to suck.

Shauna went back to her room, shutting the door behind her. She rubbed her face with her hands and took a few deep breaths. It was unfair for Jackie to get that upset. She had asked for this, and now that Shauna was doing it she was just gonna get all pissed off and leave? She was just gonna make Shauna feel like shit about the whole thing? Fuck.

A couple minutes later, Lottie knocked on her door, opening it slowly. "Hey. Where's Jackie?" Shauna sighed and Lottie must've seen how stressed she was, because she walked in and shut the door behind her. "What happened?"

Shauna looked up at the picture of her and Adam. "She wasn't thrilled with a picture of him being on my nightstand." Lottie squinted at her and shook her head.

"So she left?"

"She said she needed air." Lottie shook her head and wrapped Shauna in a hug.

"I'm sorry. She'll get over it."

Shauna shook her head. "I just don't know what she wants me to do."

Lottie sighed, "I don't think she knows either, honey." Shauna nodded and calmed herself down. "Come on. Come out there with me. She'll be back soon." Shauna nodded and allowed Lottie to lead her to the kitchen. She poured her a shot and they took it together as Van and Tai came out of the shower. The door opened and Jackie walked in holding a bag from a carryout.

"Hey, Jax. Where ya been?" Van asked. Shauna looked at her, waiting for her response. Jackie's eyes locked on Shauna's when she answered.

"Just ran out to get some snacks." She held up the bag and everybody just took it for the whole story. They dropped it and started to get some drinks together, planning on staying in and playing a new game Van had brought. Jackie was being a little weird, but overall was just acting like nothing had happened. Shauna was glad, because she really didn't want to waste their time together. She just wanted to be with her.

The game was called Who's Most Likely To? and Van was excited about it because it couldn't be targeted at anyone. The cards were premade. She made it into a drinking game, declaring that if you got a card you took a drink. That felt fair, so they went with it.

Van read the first card, "Who's most likely to become a millionaire?"

Everybody looked at Lottie. "Don't say me. My dad's money doesn't count," she said.

"Okay, well then I say Tai. That lawyer money's gotta be pretty good, right?" Jackie said. Everybody nodded in agreement and handed the card over to her.

Lottie was next, "Who's most likely to get away with murder?"

"Shauna, 100%. She's a sneaky lil thing," Tai said. Jackie laughed and Shauna smiled, taking a drink. She looked over at Jackie, who nodded in agreement.

"I'm not sure if that's a good thing or a bad thing." Shauna said, raising her eyebrow for explanation.

"I don't think it's bad. The question isn't who would kill somebody, it's who would get away with it. Just means you're a good secret keeper," Jackie said. Shauna could live with that, she decided.

Shauna read the next card, "Who's most likely to date two people at once." Everybody looked around at each other and then their eyes slowly settled on Jackie. Shauna probably deserved it just as much, but she wasn't gonna complain.

"Oh just give me the damn card," she joked, snatching it out of Shauna's hand and lightening the mood a bit.

Jackie read the next one, "Who's most likely to visit every continent?" Jackie didn't even wait for the group's synopsis before handing the card to Lottie. It was well deserved for sure.

Jackie had gotten a lot of the cards. It was lighthearted fun, but she was definitely getting tipsy fast. Tai picked up the last card in the deck and read it out loud. "Who's most likely to have the highest body count?" Tai laughed and looked at Jackie. 'Well jeez, Jax. You're kind of getting attacked tonight, huh?' Why did they just assume it was Jackie? She hadn't been with that many people. Like three, right? Jackie looked up at Shauna in a panic and she felt the blood leave her face. She had been lying to her. Tai continued, "Can anybody beat five?" Shauna choked on her own spit. FIVE? What the fuck? They got into a whole fight about Shauna not telling her that shit and now she had just been lying about it like it was nothing? Shauna was HOT. She hadn't been so angry in a long time. Lottie said something but Shauna couldn't even hear it. All she could focus on was the worry in Jackie's eyes. She hadn't wanted her to know. Why? Why would she do that?

“I guess it’s mine.” Jackie looked away, grabbed the card from Tai and finished her drink.

“Feels like if you get the last card you should have to finish your drink, right?” Jackie laughed awkwardly, stood up and walked to the kitchen. Shauna downed the rest of her drink too and trailed her. She didn’t feel even a little bit in control of herself but she didn’t care. Jackie had spent so much time making her feel like shit when she was doing the SAME FUCKING THING.

“Five?” Shauna asked. Jackie didn’t look at her. She just uncapped the vodka and poured herself a shot. Great, so now she was taking shots to deal with Shauna. Why? Why did she need to do fucking any of this? “Jackie, don’t do that.” She took the shot anyway and turned to face her, looking annoyingly defiant.

“Yes, five. You’ve fucked four people and I’ve fucked five people. What does it matter?”

A fire lit in Shauna’s chest. What could she possibly mean what does it matter? What the fuck was she talking about? She’s the one that decided it mattered! She took a deep breath, trying not to start screaming. “After all that shit you gave me… All the shit I had to take, and you’re keeping this from me?”

Jackie rolled her eyes and Shauna just wanted to grab her and shake her. She didn’t have a fucking clue what was going on. She thought they were in a good place and now it was like all of that was a lie. “It wasn’t a big deal, Shauna. I wasn’t keeping it from you. It just wasn’t important.”

Shauna felt like her head was going to explode. What. The. Fuck. “Not a big deal? Seriously? You were fucking livid when I didn’t tell you about Adam.”

“Going on dates is so much fucking different and you know that.” Like she didn’t fucking lose it when Shauna mentioned sleeping with Taylor. Jackie poured herself another shot, giving Shauna another reason to be fucking pissed off. Why did she need to drink like this to have a fucking conversation?

“Who were they?” Shauna needed to know. She grabbed onto the edge of the counter, using it to relieve the need to fucking squeeze something until it broke.

Jackie glared at her, “What does that matter? I don’t understand why you’re sitting here analyzing the number of people I’ve fucked.” Shauna felt like her eyes were going to pop out of her head. She looked down at the counter and took a deep breath, trying to figure out how to continue having this conversation. “I thought you were over it.” Why the fuck did she think Shauna was over it? What the fuck did she think this was?

Her head snapped up and she stared into Jackie’s eyes, confused as to what she was thinking. “What did I do to make you think that I was ever fucking over it?”

“You got a fucking boyfriend, Shauna! You’re fucking over it. All I’m doing is trying to get there too.” Shauna couldn’t even control the words that left her mouth from that point on. She was fucking livid. This was all so fucking ridiculous.

“Who was it? Was it Renee?”

“Jesus Christ. No, it wasn’t Renee.” Jackie rolled her eyes and broke their eye contact.

“Why won’t you just tell me, then?” Who the fuck could it have been? Why hide it?

"Because I don't remember! I don't fucking know. I couldn't pick them out of a goddamn lineup, Shauna." Shauna glared at her. She had actually never been so mad before in her life.

"I cannot fucking believe how awful you made me feel about not talking to you. All so that you could turn around and do the same thing."

"I never lied about it. You never asked." Shauna's jaw dropped and she took two steps closer to her, getting in her face.

Shauna whispered, trying not to scream, "Every fucking time we talked when you got back from the bar I asked how it was, what you did. You neglected to tell me. That's lying. It's lying in the same way I lied. This is the most hypocritical thing you've ever done, and that's really fucking saying something."

Jackie held eye contact with her, smiling ever so slightly. "Sounds like you've got more to say, Shipman." She took a step forward so that they were standing nose to nose. "Go ahead, say it. I'd hate to have to read it in your journal three months from now." Shauna flinched. It was a low blow, and it fucking stung. What was wrong with her? Why was she trying to fucking hurt her?

"Fuck off, Jackie. You want me to tell you I'm over it? You want me to say I don't care about any of it anymore? Fine. I'm over it. I'm over fucking all of this." Shauna couldn't help but look down at her lips. She wasn't over it. She just couldn't tell if she wanted to kiss her or hit her right now. Jackie grinned at her, like it didn't hurt her at all.

"Another fucking lie out of your mouth. Shocker." They stared at each other for a second. Shauna couldn't really deny it, and she had nothing more to say. Jackie grabbed her drink and walked out without another word. Shauna fought the urge to scream and throw shit. Instead, she just hit herself in her thigh over and over again. She was so angry and so fucking frustrated. Yes, Jackie wasn't acting like herself, but she was also fucking other people and not talking to her about it. That wasn't just a bad day. That was probably a lot of daily decisions actually, which kind of made it worse. It was like Shauna didn't know anything about her. She thought she was dating fucking Charlie. She took a big swig of rum straight from the bottle and chased it with water from the sink, splashing some on her face and the back of her neck. She took some deep breaths and collected herself before refilling her drink and walking back out to the group. She wasn't going to storm out. She wasn't going to make a scene. If Jackie wanted to be a dick or hate her or whatever the goal was, then she was going to have to sit in the same room as her and fucking deal with it. Jackie smiled at her, which made her fucking blood boil and Shauna pulled her eyes away.

Lottie looked nervously between them like she knew something was wrong. Shauna was sure it was obvious. She really didn't say another word for the rest of the night. Nat came home and Shauna knew she needed to go to bed. One conversation with her would let her know something happened, and nobody needed a Nat/Jackie fight right now. She said good night to Nat and walked into her bedroom, shutting the door behind her. She hadn't calmed down even a little bit. She wanted to know why Jackie was lying. She wanted to know why she was being so fucking mean. She knew it wasn't even the important part, but she wanted to know who she slept with. She wanted to know when and where. She was fucking obsessing over it. She heard a knock at the door and knew it was her.

She sat down on her bed and rested her head in her hands, trying to calm herself down. "Come in, Jax."

Shauna heard the door open and then Jackie's voice, all quiet and filled with guilt. "I'm sorry." Shauna sighed and looked up at her. She looked like she felt bad, but right now that wasn't enough. She wanted to understand.

"Why did you fuck them?" Jackie shut the door and sat down in her desk chair across from where Shauna sat.

"To feel something. To feel anything." What and Shauna couldn't do that?

"I don't understand why you wouldn't tell me."

"I don't understand why you care so much." Anger started to bubble back up in Shauna's stomach. Of course she cares! Of course she fucking cares!

"It's the double standard, Jackie!" Jackie rolled her eyes, which just pissed her off more. 'It's okay when you need to know every detail of my sex life. It's okay when you ask me if my boyfriend makes me cum. It's okay when you get pissed off at me for not being forthcoming, but when I get upset that you failed to mention two girls you apparently fucked like it was nothing I'm fucking crazy.' Jackie sighed and looked down, rubbing at her eyes. It pissed Shauna off that she couldn't look at her and talk about this. It pissed her off that she was just supposed to be fucking indifferent to it all. "I'm not allowed to fucking care at all, apparently. When all I fucking do is care." Shauna felt herself getting angrier with every word out of her mouth. She stood up and started taking slow steps over to the desk, "All I fucking do is wonder who's touching you in a bar. Wonder who's kissing your neck, who's leaving marks on your skin. I'm sitting out at dinner with Adam wondering what you were doing instead of answering my phone call an hour earlier. But you want to tell me that I'm over it." Jackie's eyes were glued to Shauna's lips but it was like it didn't even register. She just needed to yell. She needed to just fucking scream at her. Shauna was inches from her face and she had no idea what she was going to say until it came out of her mouth. Everything just spilled out of her like it had been pent up for years. "I will *never* be over it. I'm just going to have to live the rest of my life resisting every fucking instinct in my body telling me to fuck you on this desk." Jackie gasped softly, still not looking her in the eyes.

"Don't." Shauna was still pissed, but she was also confused.

"Don't what?"

Jackie repeated herself. "Don't resist it…" Shauna didn't hesitate. Her mouth crashed into Jackie's and her hands grabbed hard at her shorts. Shauna had them ripped off of her before either of them could even think to breathe. She was just acting. There was no thought involved. She wanted all of her. Every fucking inch of her. Shauna wanted all of it. She pushed her fingers deep inside of her and she could tell Jackie was about to scream. She covered her mouth with her hand and fucked her hard and borderline violently. All of her frustration, all of her anger went into letting Jackie know that she was fucking HERS. Jackie grunted against Shauna's hand and she grabbed desperately at Shauna's biceps. She groaned and her eyes rolled back and Shauna just wanted to kiss her. She wanted it so fucking badly.

"You have to be quiet, okay?" Shauna said. Jackie nodded frantically and Shauna moved her hand down to Jackie's hip, replacing it with her mouth. She pushed her tongue deep into

Jackie's mouth, wanting to taste her again, not able to slow down in any capacity. She bit down hard on her bottom lip, unintentionally drawing a little blood but loving the way it tasted mixed in with their spit. Shauna moaned quietly and Jackie pulled at her shirt, lifting it up and pushing her hands underneath. She dug her nails into Shauna's back and dragged them down, pulling and tearing at her skin. Shauna's eyes rolled back in her head and she moaned into Jackie's mouth, fucking her even harder and even deeper. Shauna pulled away to see her reaction, but her eyes just clung to the little cut she had left behind on her lip. It felt like she was completely consumed with her desire for Jackie. She leaned back in and licked at the little dribble of blood, sucking at the skin and feeling Jackie's pussy clench around her fingers. Shauna couldn't have stopped if she wanted to. She needed more of her. She picked Jackie up and held her exactly where she wanted her as she worked her from one orgasm to the next. Jackie's mouth hung open and Shauna just watched her try to stay quiet. She pulled at the collar of Shauna's shirt frantically. She wanted it off. Shauna laughed and slowed down so that Jackie could pull it over her head. She wasted no time unclasping her bra and staring hard at her tits. Jackie moaned at the sight of them, and Shauna just fucking loved the way she was looking at her. She was looking at Shauna like she was all she was ever going to want. Shauna moaned as Jackie reached out to grab them, squeezing her nipples and pulling at her skin. She lifted Jackie up and started to fuck her again, letting her bounce up and down on Shauna's fingers. Jackie pulled at her hair and leaned in, biting down hard on Shauna's shoulder as she came again. She let Jackie calm down a little bit and then threw her down on the bed. She grabbed her legs and pulled her down hard so that she was hanging off the side just a little. Jackie moaned at the feeling of being thrown around and Shauna grinned.

"Do you like it like this, baby?"

Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head, "Oh fuck, *yes. Please* just don't stop." Shauna dropped to her knees and pushed her face in between Jackie's legs, eating her out like she never had before. It was savage, desperate, and messy. Shauna was obsessed with the taste, the feeling, the sounds that Jackie made when she did it. Jackie tried to sit up and she started to grab at Shauna's neck, but Shauna wasn't having it. She was nowhere near fucking done. Without even looking up from Jackie's pussy she reached out and pushed Jackie back down with a hand on her stomach and more force than was probably necessary. Jackie hit the bed so hard the mattress bounced her back up and she came immediately at the force of it. She shook violently and Shauna pushed her tongue inside of the girl, tasting every drop of her cum and not stopping until she came again.

"I'm— Shauna, Imgonnascream, Imgonnascream. You— fuck!" Shauna pulled herself away and groaned at Jackie. She glared at her while Jackie tried to catch her breath. She wanted more. She was giving her a small break, but she definitely wasn't done. Jackie's eyes clung to her tits and she said, "You're so fucking hot." Words meant she was good to keep going, right?

Shauna was immediately back between her thighs. She put two fingers inside her and pushed them deep and slow in and out. Jackie's head pushed back into the mattress and she made these fucking perfect little whining sounds, trying to stay quiet. Shauna wanted to see her, though. She wanted to watch her eyes water and her mouth hang open. She grabbed Jackie by the jaw and pulled her head back up to make eye contact with her. "If you move I stop. Watch."

Shauna pulled her hand back and continued to fuck her. Jackie's eyes immediately rolled back in her head and she let it fall back slightly. Shauna stopped fucking her and grabbed her again by the jaw, more forcefully this time. Jackie whined, "No, please. Don't stop." Shauna grinned and pushed her fingers back in, holding eye contact as she licked and sucked on Jackie's stomach, she ran her tongue all the way down to her clit and started to suck gently. Shauna stared at her as her body shook. She grabbed her hip with her free hand and held Jackie in place as she fucked her. She could tell that Jackie was trying so hard to listen. She was trying so hard to hold eye contact, but by her fifth orgasm she couldn't control herself anymore. She was grunting and squirming and Shauna just fucked her slowly, enjoying it.

After a few minutes, Shauna smiled at her, "It's okay, baby girl. I won't stop. Just feel it." Jackie's head fell back and Shauna reached up to cover her mouth as she fucked her. She didn't stop until Jackie's body could barely move anymore. It had to have been at least an hour filled with nothing but Jackie's orgasms. It was fucking perfect. When she was heavy breathing and trying not to pass out, Shauna decided it was probably time to slow down. She stood up and then collapsed next to her on the bed.

Jackie took a deep breath and rolled over on top of her. She sucked on her tits, licking her nipples and biting them softly. Shauna moaned, probably a little too loud and Jackie sucked harder. She didn't seem to care, so fuck it. She pulled Shauna's pants down and kissed her way from her ankles up to the sides of her knees, the insides of her thighs and then her hips. She licked across her stomach and then down to the spot just below her clit. It was fucking perfect. It was everything she needed. Jackie made her feel so fucking good without even really touching her. Shauna was a mess, whimpering with every lick that fell just off target. Jackie smiled. "Say please." Shauna didn't even have to think about it.

"Please. Pleasepleaseplease. Jackie, please." Jackie locked her lips around Shauna's clit and she came within seconds, letting her body shake and her groans fall out of her mouth. Jackie ran her tongue down to her opening and sucked, a feeling that Shauna had not been expecting and had fucking LOVED. She reached down and gripped Jackie's hair, holding her down there. She didn't want Jackie to ever fucking stop. Jackie moved her tongue back up to her clit and pushed a finger inside her, Shauna came again fucking immediately. Jackie pushed it gently, in and out as her pussy pulsed on it. The feeling had Shauna shaking and crying. It felt so fucking good. She felt Jackie add another finger and suck harder on her clit, picking up the pace and drving Shauna fucking crazy. She reached up with her other hand and grabbed hard at Shauna's tit, squeezing her nipple. Shauna's eyes rolled back and she moaned at the feeling of it. Jackie started to move and Shauna didn't have the ability to stop her. She didn't slow her hand down and moved up to grab her nipple in her mouth, sucking hard on it. Shauna moaned and came again, loving the way it fucking felt. It was fucking insane how easily Jackie could make her cum when it had been so difficult for Adam. It was like nothing with her. Everything fucking felt good.

Jackie removed her hand and her mouth and sat down on the bed. Shauna was breathing heavy and couldn't ask why. All she could do was pout. Jackie smiled at her. "I want you to ride my fingers. I want your tits in my face." She nodded, got up, and straddled Jackie's legs as Jackie positioned her fingers in the right spot. Shauna grabbed the back of Jackie's neck and started to move up and down on her two fingers. Somehow, it felt *so* much better with fingers than it had with a dick. She locked eyes with Jackie, which definitely helped. Jackie

stared at her like she was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, and then leaned in to start kissing her neck. Shauna start fucking herself harder, bouncing on Jackie's fingers with growing force as Jackie's lips moved down her neck to her collarbones and then her tits. Right as she started to cum, Jackie leaned back up and kissed her, absorbing what would have been *very* loud moans. Shauna got off of her slowly and watched her legs shake as she came down from her orgasm. She pushed Jackie back down and moved back between her legs, ready for so much more.

This went on until 7 am. They fucked like they were hungry, non-stop for 5 straight hours, only taking breaks to drink water occasionally. It was like they couldn't get enough of each other. Every time one of them finished the other off, they switched positions and started all over again. Eventually, they passed out sprawled over each other, finally unable to go another round.

Shauna woke up around 10 and just looked at Jackie's naked body underneath her. She kissed the skin on her shoulder and when she saw Jackie's eyes open, she bit at it. Jackie rolled over and grabbed her waist, pulling herself closer and burying her face into her tits. Shauna laughed, but the second Jackie's mouth got close to them she felt her tongue dart out and wrap itself around her nipple. Shauna threw her head back and moaned as quietly as she could. They were fucking sucked raw and so, so sensitive. Shauna rolled over on the bed, giving Jackie better access to her body. Jackie climbed back on top of her, kissing down her stomach until she disappeared under the covers. Shauna looked up at the ceiling, just feeling every nerve that Jackie was able to hit. She was gentle, which Shauna was kind of grateful for. She just licked slowly at her opening at first. Shauna wrapped her thighs around Jackie's neck and Jackie gripped hard at the skin on them. Shauna slowly ground herself onto Jackie's tongue over and over again until she came. It didn't take long. Jackie reappeared from the covers, "Sorry. I couldn't resist."

"Don't ever fucking apologize for that again," Shauna said with a laugh. Jackie smiled and kissed her. "We should probably get up, baby. I'm sure everybody else is."

"We just went to bed," Jackie whined. It was cute. Shauna kissed her forehead.

"C'mon. We can get coffee." Jackie groaned and Shauna slowly stood up and started grabbing the clothes that had been discarded on her floor and putting them in a pile. She felt Jackie's hands wrap around her chest from behind and grab her tits. Shauna closed her eyes and leaned into Jackie's touch. She felt Jackie's lips press into her back and Shauna moaned at the feeling. It felt so good, but it also came with a sharp pain. Jackie must have really dug into her last night.

"I'm so sorry… I didn't realize. Did I hurt you?"

Shauna turned around grinning, "Only the good kind." She looked at her back in the mirror and her smile got bigger, "I kind of like them there." She had five deep scratches down her back, all bright red like they had bled. She also had a very obvious bite mark in her shoulder.

"You're crazy," Jackie said with a laugh. They got ready together and got dressed together. It was almost like how it used to be, but Shauna knew it wasn't. She knew that Jackie had just been drunk and angry last night. They'd have a good couple days together and then she'd tell her it was a bad idea. She could do that. That could be okay, but Shauna

had to prepare herself for what she knew was coming. She didn't want to ruin anything now, figuring if her heart was gonna get broken, she might as well enjoy this time while she had it. Shauna spent the rest of the morning cherishing the forehead kisses and the lingering touches that they no longer had to resist. It was a perfect morning, really. As long as she didn't think about life in a week, she could be really, really happy.

Chapter 44

When they finally walked out of the bedroom, Jackie ran face first into Van, who apparently had been waiting just outside the door. She dragged Jackie into the bathroom. Shauna just raised her eyebrows and watched her get taken away with a little laugh. They were busted. Shauna stood outside the bathroom door, kind of unsure of what she was supposed to do. She settled on just walking out to the kitchen and dealing with the rest of their friends head on. She was expecting Nat's eye rolls and Lottie's gasps, but instead ran into nothing but Taissa Turner's glare.

"Hey, Tai," Shauna said awkwardly, looking around. Where the fuck were Lottie and Nat? She looked back at Tai, who hadn't said anything back yet. Shauna cleared her throat. This was awkward. Very, very awkward. "Where is everybody?"

"Lottie and Nat are out getting breakfast," she answered plainly.

"Oh, nice. That sounds fun." Tai squinted at her and Shauna prepared herself for whatever she was about to say.

"I don't really get you." Shauna nodded slowly, not really sure what that meant. She was hoping Tai would continue but she didn't.

"Okay, yeah. Sorry. Sometimes I don't either." Shauna was trying to make it seem lighthearted, but it wasn't really working.

"You're dating someone, right?" Tai asked. Shauna shifted a little uncomfortably. Technically, they had been calling it not-dating, but Shauna had a suspicion that Tai wouldn't care for that explanation.

"It's… complicated." Tai rolled her eyes.

"Mhm. You need to talk. Please, for everybody's sake. You need to talk to each other." Shauna nodded, but she didn't really see the point. She knew what Jackie was going to say. Why not just enjoy it while it was happening?

"I'm just trying to move at her pace, here." Tai rolled her eyes and Shauna turned around at the sound of giggling behind her. She turned to see Jackie and Van, arm and arm. Van sent Shauna a wink before realizing the very not playful vibe they were experiencing. Jackie figured it out quicker.

"Hey, guys… what's up?" Jackie asked. Shauna looked to Tai to answer her. She wasn't really sure, honestly.

"Nothing, just talking," Tai said with a smile. Jackie and Van looked at each other and Van shrugged. "Nat and Lottie left a while ago for breakfast."

It was quiet for a second before Shauna decided to just take a little initiative here. "Do you guys wanna get coffee with us?"

Van jumped up and wrapped her arms around Tai's shoulders, "Yes! Coffee. Come on, Tai. We're leaving." Shauna looked at Jackie and exhaled. Jackie smiled at her and it was like the conversation had never happened. She could get rejected later, she just wanted to live in a little piece of happiness for a second first. Tai seemed to warm up to her a little bit over their coffee double date and when they got back, Nat and Lot were waiting in the living room. Lottie jumped up like they had been gone for years and gave them all a hug. Nat gave her a knowing look and Shauna made up some lame excuse for them to both be in the kitchen at the same time. She knew Nat would want to talk about this.

"Jackie was not in the living room this morning," Nat said, staring into Shauna's soul.

"Oh, really? That's strange," Shauna said, refusing to meet her gaze.

"I thought so too. Then I heard some heavy breathing coming from your room and it all just kind of clicked." Shauna nodded slowly, a smile spreading over her face. "You guys fucked?"

Shauna laughed a little. "Like all night." Nat shook her head, hiding a smile.

"Jesus Christ. Are you guys ever gonna figure your shit out?"

"Probably not. It only started because I found out she had been lying about sleeping with people at school. We got in this big fight and we were both so drunk and it just kind of… happened. We haven't had the whole 'I just can't, I'm sorry' talk yet."

"But it's coming?" Shauna laughed.

"Oh for sure. She made it very clear, Nat. Several times."

Nat cocked her head to the side, "Like several times last night or just in general?"

"In general, but still. It isn't gonna happen for me. I think I'm finding my peace with that. If I just get these occasional perfect drunken nights that Jackie deems are slip ups or whatever… then maybe I should just be taking what I can get."

"So you haven't talked about it like at all?" Shauna looked away from her and Nat groaned.

"You sound like Tai. Come on, I don't want to ruin the trip yet. We both know I'm gonna lose my shit. All of our friends don't need to be sitting in the front row when it happens." Nat sighed, shaking her head.

"You give me fucking headaches." Shauna laughed, very aware of that. They spent the day at this local farmer's market that Shauna had never been to before. Nat and Lottie looked well acclimated, though. It was cute. Shauna liked it when they acted all coupley. Jackie and her were touchy and it was nice. It was really nice. Comfortable. Jackie bought them flowers for their apartment, and Shauna's heart soared at the probably misplaced understanding that they were for her.

They got back and Jackie immediately decided on taking a nap on the couch. Van was eager to join, so Shauna just went back to her room, cleaning up a bit and trying not to think about how hard she was probably about to crash and burn. She started to panic. What if Adam showed up at the bar and ruined it all way too soon? She had one night left with Jackie and she wasn't gonna spend it paranoid that he'd run into them. She decided to just call him.

“Hey, it’s Adam.”

“Hey. It’s Shauna.”

Adam’s voice got warmer, “Oh, hey. How’s your little girl’s trip going?”

Shauna sighed. She felt a little guilty at being so dishonest, but that wasn’t the point right now. “It’s good, yeah I’m having fun. I just…” Shauna hesitated. She didn’t want to tell him they were going somewhere so that he could conveniently show up. “I missed you. What are you up to tonight?”

“I’m actually going bowling with some of my friends from high school.”

Shauna sighed with relief. “Oh, good. That’ll be fun!” Nat opened her door slowly and nodded at her. She smelled pizza. “Hey, sorry. Nat’s calling. Have fun tonight, though. Talk to you later.” Shauna hung up the phone before he could ask her the same question.

“Hey, sorry. Jackie’s up and was asking where you were. I didn’t really wanna tell her you were talking to Adam.”

Shauna smiled awkwardly, “Yeah, sorry. Thanks. He’s going bowling tonight, by the way.”

Nat sucked her lips in, “You’re living quite the double life.”

“We’re not exclusive. We’re actually not even dating.”

“Doesn’t mean you’re not being a dick.” Shauna sighed. She knew that, obviously.

“What if this is the last time she ever acts like she wants me?”

Nat sighed, shaking her head, “Then she doesn’t deserve you now.” Shauna shook her head, not willing to let it go. Jackie was offering it and Shauna had no intention of turning her away. If she told Adam and broke things off just for Jackie to do what everybody fucking knew she was going to, then she’d be left with nothing. Again, she would be fucking alone.

“I just can’t let it go. Not yet.” Nat shook her head and Shauna followed her out to the kitchen. She grabbed a piece of pizza and sat down next to Jackie on the couch. Jackie lifted her legs up and Shauna grabbed them, pulling them out on her lap. Nat left for work a couple hours later, and they started the pregame. An hour or so later, Shauna came back from the bathroom to Lottie’s judgement. She shunned her and gave her a little ‘tsk tsk’.

“Woah, what did I do?” Shauna asked, looking around.

“Van told on us,” Jackie said. Shauna laughed and looked over at Lottie. She was kind of surprised that Nat hadn’t. She shrugged and Lottie’s jaw hung open.

“Oh all of a sudden y’all can keep a secret?” she said with a laugh.

Shauna looked at Jackie and decided on a change of conversation topic. “Shots anyone?” Lottie rolled her eyes, but trailed her into the kitchen anyway. They got to Nat’s bar at 9 to continue their pregame. Shauna and Jackie were drunk, leaning into each other, sitting too close, touching too much. They were having fun and since Shauna knew Adam would be with his friends, she didn’t care who saw them. At 10 they walked over to the club next door. Shauna leaned into Jackie’s ear, probably a little unnecessarily close to whisper, “I’m

gonna get us some drinks. Meet me on the dance floor?" Jackie smiled at her and nodded before getting dragged deep into the crowd by Van. Shauna watched her, enjoying this feeling, however fleeting it might be.

She walked up to the bar and saw Adam sitting with a couple friends on a stool. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He saw her and waved her over, all excited. "Shauna! No way! I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were coming here tonight. We got done bowling and the boys wanted a drink." Adam introduced her as the girl he was not dating to four different guys, but Shauna couldn't even hear him. All she could hear was her whole world crashing down. Her honeymoon with Jackie was ending a night too early, and it sent her into a full blown panic. She was in complete damage control mode, trying to preserve whatever relationships she could. She knew Jackie would probably be mad, but they were always just going to go back to being friends, right? Wasn't that what Jackie wanted? She kept saying she couldn't do the commitment, she couldn't do the worry or the trust. Shauna felt genuinely sick when she saw her storming over. She felt her face fall and she turned awkwardly to square up to her. She'd probably just revert back to being her friend the second she saw Adam anyway, right?

"Hey, Jax. Look who I found!" Shauna said, faking excitement. Jackie didn't even spare Adam a glance. She stared Shauna down.

"I'm sorry… who is this?" Shauna was at a loss for words. Not only was she not doing their whole friends thing, she was also pretending not to know who he was at all. Oh, god. This was about to be very, very bad.

Adam reached out from behind Shauna, extending his hand. "Hey, I'm Adam. It's Jackie, right?" Jackie nodded, still refusing to look at him. Shauna just watched her anger build. She didn't know what to do. She felt stuck. One more probably already ruined night with Jackie or the rest of college getting Adam's validation. It was an impossibly hard fucking dilemma. Jackie was already pissed. Shauna wasn't going to be able to fix it. Her only option was damage control.

"I didn't know he was going out tonight, but when I walked up to the bar he was sitting right here."

Adam laughed and Shauna knew he was about to start talking again. She closed her eyes and shook her head, hoping this was just some fucking nightmare and he'd shut up or better yet, she'd wake up naked in bed with Jackie like she had this morning. Adam's voice cut through her hopes like they were nothing, "Yeah, I didn't realize you girls were gonna be out either. But now it's cool cause I get to meet all of my girl's friends." The 'my girl' drew Jackie's attention away from Shauna and she just hoped more than anything that she wasn't going to deck him. They sat in silence for a minute, Shauna just waiting to see what happened next. Jackie's face conformed into her picture perfect, chipper self and Shauna's heart broke a little.

"Yeah, it's really cool. Good to meet you, Adam." Shauna looked down at her feet and Jackie pushed her shoulder a little too hard to move past her and get to the bar. She ordered three shots and a vodka cran, downing them all before turning and pretty much sprinting to the bathroom.

Shauna chased her down, "Jackie, look. I didn't know he was gonna be here, I promise. I'm sorry. Come on, please. It's one night. Just one night, please." Jackie looked at her in

the mirror and then turned around. Shauna felt like she was going to cry. This was so fucking awful.

"Does he know about me?" Shauna opened her mouth to speak and Jackie cut her off, "Don't lie to me, Shauna." She looked down at her feet. He didn't, really.

"No. He doesn't know the whole truth about us." Jackie nodded and Shauna watched her heart break in real time.

"Was it not real enough for you? Sex with me, a relationship with me doesn't count? Is it because it's with a woman?" What? No. That was actually the fucking opposite of the truth. If anything, Adam wasn't real. Jackie was always fucking real.

"No. Of course it was real. Of course it counts." Shauna was so stressed she couldn't get her words out. She was stuttering and sweating. Jackie just glared at her.

"Does he know about Jeff?" Shauna sighed and rubbed at her forehead. He did, but it didn't mean what she thought it did. Fuck. She couldn't get her brain to work the way it needed to to explain that. She felt her breath pick up and she was seconds from a panic attack.

"Jackie, please. It's not like that. You know that I know it's real. You know how much you mean to me. Why are you doing this? One night. That's all I'm asking for." Shauna begged her. Jackie didn't ever have to meet Adam again after this. Why did she have to blow it all up? She was going to go back to Charlie and her life with Renee literally in 12 hours. She didn't want her, so why was it so fucking awful for somebody else to? It didn't seem fair.

Jackie's jaw clenched and her face went scarily still. "Actually, I'm learning that I don't know anything. I am such a fucking idiot. Jesus Christ. Don't worry about your one night. I'll give you the rest of them too. I'm sorry for making you waste your time on something so inconsequential. Won't happen again." She started to walk past her, and Shauna grabbed her arm. No. She couldn't believe that. She didn't, right? She couldn't. Shauna couldn't let her believe that.

"Stop. Jackie, just stop. Why are you doing this?" Jackie glared at her and pushed past her to walk out of the bathroom. There was nothing Shauna could do. She started to hyperventilate and locked herself in a stall, trying to take deep breaths and not fucking cry. It didn't make any sense. Yes, it was wrong that they had to run into each other. But really it felt more wrong to Adam, who Shauna was lying to. She had been honest with Jackie! Why did she feel so comfortable getting angry? They were literally just talking. Jackie was just done with her now because she had talked to the man that Jackie knew she was hanging out with? Fuck.

Shauna calmed herself down and walked back out to the sink, touching up her makeup and letting the cold water slow her breathing. She walked out to the bar and found Jackie kissing somebody in the crowd. She had her hands in the girl's hair and this other bitch had her hands on Jackie's ass. Shauna was pissed now. She couldn't *talk* to Adam, but Jackie just got to makeout with somebody random? She got to let somebody else grope her and put on a fucking show? Why did she have to be such a fucking hypocrite all the fucking time? How was that fair? Shauna made her way back to Adam. He said something to her, but Shauna couldn't hear it. She was completely trained on Jackie's ass pressed against this girl and her

lips glued to Jackie's neck. Shauna got a better look and realized she knew the girl. She had a class with her. Fucking Samantha. The realization made her sick. Adam passed her a shot glass and she downed it as Jackie looked over at her and smiled. All she could fucking do was watch. Adam pulled her back into him as he talked to somebody else. Shauna could barely feel it.

Shauna watched as Jackie turned her and Sam around, staring at Shauna over her shoulder. Jackie grabbed the girl's hair and Shauna watched her arms wrap around to hold Jackie by the hips. Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head in response and she leaned down and kissed the girl A-FUCKING-GAIN. Shauna turned and ordered two more shots. She watched Sam's hands grab Jackie's ass and Jackie smiled at her, turning them around so that Shauna could get a good view of where her hands were. Shauna downed both of her shots and when she looked back up, Van had pulled Jackie out of the bar. Shauna stood up to follow them, but Lottie appeared in front of her to stop it.

"Let's not, okay? Please. Maybe this is a tomorrow morning conversation."

"What does she want me to do, Lot?"

"I don't know what's going on, honey. I don't know."

Shauna felt her eyes tear up and she fell into Lottie's shoulder. Lottie sighed and wrapped her arms around her. "Does she want me to never speak to him again? She doesn't want me but nobody else can have me? What does she want me to do?"

"I don't know."

Shauna stood back up, "She's gonna blow up at me just to makeout with that bitch over there like it's not that much fucking worse? All I did was talk to him!" Lottie looked caught between two places.

"Don't do anything stupid, please. I'm gonna go tell Nat to fake a family emergency or something." She disappeared before Shauna could stop her and Shauna stood there, unsure of what to do. In her lost, emotionally stunted state, she decided to just walk back over to Adam. What else was she supposed to be doing? Adam pulled her into a hug. He was obviously drunk, but the comfort was surprisingly nice. He beamed at her and Shauna just looked at him. He pulled her closer and leaned down to whisper something in her ear. Shauna stood up on her tip toes so he could get close enough and he said, "You look so beautiful tonight." Shauna offered him a small smile and leaned back in, letting him wrap her in another hug. She was fucking wasted, and this was probably the worst fucking night of her life.

Jackie's voice pulled her out of any type of comfort she thought she had, "What the fuck are you doing?" Jackie demanded. Shauna turned around, faking confusion. What was *she* doing? What had JACKIE been fucking doing?

"What do you mean?" she asked. Adam looked between the girls, obviously confused and laughed awkwardly.

"We come all this way to visit you and you can't pull yourself away long enough to spend any time with us?" Shauna cocked her head to the side. That's how they were going to do this? By yelling shit in code in front of everybody?

"You looked like you were doing just fine on your own." Shauna felt like her whole body was on fire as she stared Jackie down, daring her to try to dismiss what she had just been doing.

Shauna flinched as Adam tried to diffuse the situation, "Hey, baby. Why don't you just go hang out with your friends for a bit? I'll be here when you're ready to go home." All it did was piss Jackie off more. The fire in her eyes turned Shauna on a little too much. Her eyes were drawn to the bruise she had left behind on her lip last night. Fuck, this was so fucked up. Why couldn't Jackie just take a fucking leap? Why did they have to do this whole 'just friends' but ridiculously fucking jealous and fighting against constant tension at the same time thing. Why did she fucking want that?

Van grabbed her arm gently and tried to pull her away. Jackie brushed her off, "Just forget it." Jackie turned to Van. "I gotta pee. Alone." Van held her hands up and shot a look full of hatred in Shauna's direction. Jackie stormed off to the bathroom and Van turned back to the dance floor. Shauna let her head fall and Adam laughed awkwardly.

"Why don't you go make sure she's okay? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cause all this." Shauna shook her head and walked after her. She knew it was probably rude, but she couldn't care about Adam's feelings right now, regardless how selfish that might have been. She was completely spinning out. She was a fucking mess.

She stormed into the bathroom and found Jackie at the sinks again, "What the fuck are you doing?" she practically fucking screamed.

"What am *I* doing? What the fuck are YOU doing?" Jackie screamed back.

"Apparently watching you fuck somebody on the goddamn dance floor all night." Shauna stared at her in the mirror. She needed her to turn around and fucking look at her. If they were gonna do this then the least Jackie could do was fucking turn around.

"You're so fucking dramatic Shauna nobody was fucking. Even if we were… I'm confused what business of yours that would be." Not her business? Not her fucking business? It was happening right in front of her and Jackie knew that she was fucking in love with her. Obviously that's her business and obviously it would fucking hurt.

"I fucking love you, Jackie. I love you. That's why it's my business."

"You love me?" Jackie laughed, "Bullshit. It actually blows my mind how little I have meant to you. Over and over again I'm somehow confused when you do something to hurt me. Maybe that's just what you do, Shauna." She was absolutely fucking shocked. Jackie was gonna stand there and say that she was hurt because Shauna talked to the guy that Jackie had pretty much ASKED her to fucking start something with? She wanted her to move on, so she was trying. And somehow that was Shauna's fault?

"I hurt *you?* I only talked to him in the first place because you made it very clear that you didn't want me. Then when he fucking exists and lives in the same town as me you let some other bitch suck on your neck and grab your ass right in front of me. You don't think that's hurtful?" Shauna was yelling. She couldn't stop herself. The sight of that girl's lips on Jackie's neck was driving her fucking crazy, and when she looked down she realized she had left a mark. Shauna felt something snap. This bitch had fucking left a mark. She had fucking claimed her. What the fuck? 'She left a fucking hickey on your neck. I can see it

already.' Shauna took three steps and she was practically on top of her, with her hand pressed against the spot she had been sucking. "You let her leave a mark on you, and you made me watch it." Shauna's eyes moved from the hickey to Jackie's eyes, then down to her lips. Jackie licked them and Shauna caught her staring too. Her eyes were dark like she fucking *liked* this. Like she enjoyed seeing Shauna so pissed off.

"I didn't make you do shit. You chose to sit there with your boyfriend and stare at me. You could've come and taken me away from her. You could've kissed me right in front of her and let everybody know I was yours, but you didn't want fucking Adam to know," Jackie said it with malice. She wanted to piss Shauna off, and it was working. Shauna looked back and forth from her lips to that fucking mark on her neck, growing angrier with every second before she leaned in and kissed her, pulling her in by her neck. Jackie moaned into the kiss and her body sunk into Shauna's. She attacked her with the same breathy neediness Shauna had until she pushed her away. Fucking typical. "Fuck, Shauna. No. You picked him. You got a fucking boyfriend and decided that you'd rather be with him tonight than me. You don't get to fucking kiss me like that."

Shauna was starting to get frustrated, and her voice got shaky. She didn't know what the fuck to do. How could she make Jackie fucking understand this? "You can't be mad that I got with somebody, Jackie! You told me over and over again you didn't want a relationship. What am I supposed to do, just wait and hope you change your mind for the rest of my life? You wanted to be friends!" Shauna was waving her hands as she talked, and she felt her throat start to swell. She was seconds from a breakdown and she didn't know how to fix this.

"Well I was fucking wrong. I can't be your friend, and right now I don't think I can be your anything. Why don't you just take your boyfriend home and pray that maybe this time he can actually make you fucking cum. Hopefully it was all fucking worth it." She can't be her anything. She can't be her friend. What the fuck was happening? This wasn't fair! Jackie had fucking asked her to do this! She told her she wanted her to! She was so hurt and so fucking heartbroken that she went numb. She felt like she was back in fucking high school, her defense mechanisms taking over before she could redirect them. She took a step away from Jackie and waited, hoping that she would take something back. She wanted her to backpedal, even if it wasn't an apology. She wanted Jackie to do fucking something, but she didn't. She just stood there, giving Shauna nothing. She didn't want her. Again. She didn't fucking want her. Shauna turned on her heel and walked out, finding Adam at the bar. If this was what Jackie wanted, then fucking fine.

"Hey, are you ready?" she asked.

Adam raised an eyebrow and looked around, "Are you sure? Everything okay?"

Shauna nodded, putting a hand on his chest, "Yeah. It's all good. I just kind of want you right now." Adam grinned and let Shauna lead him out of the bar and up to her apartment. She didn't say a word, just dragged him into her bedroom and undid his belt. She was completely on autopilot, sitting him down and getting on her knees. She sucked him off and then tore her skirt off, sitting down on his lap and trying so hard to make it feel good. It just didn't. It wasn't going to, because Shauna didn't want to be there with him. She wanted Jackie. She just wanted fucking Jackie. She rode him hard until she realized it just wasn't going to happen, then she turned them over and let Adam do all the work. He came after 15 minutes or so and immediately passed out on her bed. Shauna sighed, thinking about what

Jackie was doing with fucking Samantha from Poetic History. She snuck out of her room and found Nat waiting for her on the couch.

"What the fuck is going on?" she asked. Shauna immediately broke and sank into her arms. She sobbed quietly and Nat just held her.

"She doesn't want me. She doesn't want to be my friend. She doesn't want anything to do with me." Nat rubbed her back soothingly.

"Who's in there, then?" Shauna looked up and the guilt on her face seemed to let Nat know all she needed to know. She nodded and just held Shauna closer.

"She went home with somebody I have fucking class with." Nat sighed.

"Fuck. I'm so sorry."

Shauna sniffled, trying to calm herself down. "No. I'm sorry. You didn't need to leave work. I did this. I fuck everything up. You shouldn't have to lose out on money because I'm a fucking dumbass."

Nat shook her head, "Hey. You're family. It's not a thing, okay?" Shauna shook her head, refusing to accept that. It wasn't an excuse for her to take advantage. "Listen, if this is what you need, this is what you need, but they're gonna be home soon. The club's probably closing right now." Shauna sighed.

"Okay. Yeah. I'm gonna shower, I think." Nat nodded and hugged her again.

"You're gonna be okay. We will get through this, okay?" Shauna nodded and walked to the bathroom. She turned the water on and finally started throwing up all the alcohol she had been putting in her system. She climbed into the shower and sat under the water until it ran cold. She heard everyone come in and gave it an hour or so before turning the water off and sneaking back into her bedroom, taking a melatonin pill and passing out next to Adam. Jackie hadn't been with them, and Shauna had expected that, but it fucking killed her. It really fucking killed her. It didn't take long for the sleeping pill to take effect, and before she knew it she didn't have to think about any of it anymore.

Chapter 45

The next morning, Shauna listened to Tai and Van say goodbye through the door. She didn't hear Jackie's voice once. She really didn't want to talk to her, but if she had been there Shauna didn't know what she would've done. It didn't matter anyway. Jackie didn't want to talk to her. Lottie walked them down, and when she came back up Shauna practically shoved Adam out the front door. She turned around to Lottie and Nat staring at her like disappointed parents. Lottie approached her gently, "What happened, Shauna?" Shauna collapsed to the floor, leaning against the front door and tucking her head between her legs. Nat sighed and sat down with her.

Shauna knew she should answer the question, but she only had one thing on her mind. "She's gone?"

Lottie sighed and joined them on the ground, "Yeah, honey. She's gone."

Shauna started to cry, letting her body shake with the sobs she tried to hold back the night before. "She got so angry that I was with him. She got so upset that I was talking to him. I thought she didn't want me. She said she didn't want me." Shauna felt her eyes gloss over as Nat pulled her into her chest and just held her in place. Lottie ran her fingers through her hair, trying to calm her down, but it didn't work. Nothing was going to work. She felt fucking empty.

She didn't eat, didn't sleep, didn't shower or move for the next four days. She didn't call Jackie, and Jackie didn't call her. Shauna wasn't really sure what she would be calling for. What was she supposed to say? She didn't feel like she was wrong for being with Adam, but she also hated that she had upset her. What was she supposed to fucking do? Adam had been calling, and Shauna refused to answer. It was becoming very, very clear how unimportant he was. She didn't have the energy for him right now. Shauna spent all day in bed, cuddling with the shirt that she had taken off of Jackie that night they spent together. It was probably disgusting now, with the way Shauna had been sobbing into it. Classes started and Nat came in to check on her.

"Are you gonna go to class at some point?" Shauna just turned over. Nat sighed, "So no, then?"

"And see fucking Sam? I'd kill her. I would fucking kill her." Nat exhaled slowly and sat down on her bed.

"Maybe we should go get some lunch or something?"

"No thanks."

Nat rubbed her shoulder, "You know… Adam's been by a few times."

Shauna rolled her eyes, "He'll be fine." Nat hesitated and Shauna knew she was just looking for something to say. Unfortunately, there just wasn't really anything left.

"Maybe you should call her."

Shauna scoffed, “And say what?”

“I don’t know. Maybe just see if she’ll answer.”

Shauna thought about it for a few days before finally deciding to call. She was a mess and she fucking missed her. Her life was miserable without her. She just wanted to hear her voice. It had been over a week, and she couldn’t fucking handle it anymore. Sometime around midnight, she caved. She dialed the phone and just listened to it ring. She hoped Jackie was there, and not in somebody’s bed. She lost all ability to breathe when she realized Jackie wasn’t going to answer. The voicemail tone played and Shauna hesitated. She hadn’t really thought this far ahead. Fuck. She had to say something. “Are we— are we just not going to ever talk again? I know that… I know you were mad…” She felt fucking lost in her own words. What was she supposed to say right now? Jesus, maybe she should’ve never called. She felt like such a fucking dumbass, and her whole body stiffened at that realization. “We can’t just never fucking speak again, Jackie.” She hung up the phone and collapsed into her bed. She felt so fucking numb. She just held onto Jackie’s shirt and breathed in her scent, trying to pretend that she had never left.

The voicemail attempt had completely sent Shauna into a spiral. She realized that Jackie did actually just never want to talk to her again. She wasn’t going to answer her calls, wasn’t going to respond to her voicemails or call her back. She was actually done with her. Shauna tried not to spiral, but really she didn’t have much self control anymore.

The next day she called again. She knew she had to apologize, but she really thought Jackie was going to too. She just was so angry. What did Jackie expect her to do? How was she supposed to handle things with her and Adam? Shauna had met Renee without completely cutting her off. It felt fucking mean to convince Shauna it would be fine to get with Adam and then just completely cut her off because of it. She heard the phone ring and part of her still had hope that she’d answer. She didn’t, of course. “I’m sorry.” She spit the words out first, knowing she’d probably lose her resolve if she waited. “I guess… I don’t know. I guess I should’ve told him to leave. I should’ve done something. Please just call me back.”

Three days went by. Still nothing. Adam had been calling non stop and it was really starting to piss her off. Every time the phone rang she sprinted over to it all hopeful and excited, just to see his name in the fucking Caller ID. She hadn’t left her room in days, and she could tell that Nat and Lottie were starting to actually worry. It had been almost two weeks of no contact to the outside world. Nat had come in a few times to force food down her throat, and Lottie came in to let her know she called in a few favors and got her a couple weeks of excused absences from her classes. It was hard to be grateful, because she felt nothing. She didn’t care about her classes, she didn’t care about her hunger. She cared about Jackie not answering her fucking phone. Shauna decided to call again. She just needed some clarity. She didn’t even know why Jackie was upset. Was she upset that they had broken the rules and then blew up as a result, or was she actually just upset at seeing her with Adam? She had worked herself in circles over it and couldn’t take it anymore. Nothing seemed real. Nothing seemed to make any fucking sense anymore.

She listened to the ringing and then the familiar click that signaled she wasn’t answering. Shauna waited for the beep and said, “I’m tired, Jackie. I don’t know what I’m supposed to be apologizing for. I don’t know if you’re upset we had sex or if you’re upset about the bar. I

just… I wish it would've gone differently. I wish we could've talked before you left. I know you didn't mean it, Jax. Please talk to me."

She didn't. She still didn't call. She didn't leave any messages. Shauna couldn't handle this. She got out of bed and walked to the living room where she knew Lottie would be sitting. She was in tears before she could even get the words out. Lot looked at her like it physically hurt her to see her crying and pulled her down to sit on the couch. "What, honey? What's up?"

"Have you talked to her? Is she okay?" Lottie looked at Nat across the room like she knew Shauna was about to get worse.

"I'm not gonna lie to you. She hasn't been answering my calls. Tai said that Van is there, though. I know she's okay." Shauna started sobbing. She was so done with her that Lottie couldn't even get a call back. Fuck. Nat walked over and they hugged her until she couldn't cry anymore. Afterward, they walked her back to her room and deposited her into her bed, letting her try to sleep off some of her emotion.

A few days later she called again, ridiculously late at night. She had been crying and she knew she sounded like a mess, but she just needed Jackie to hear her voice. She needed her to hear what she had to say. "Answer the phone, Jackie. Please. I'm just trying to talk to you. You can't go the rest of your life ignoring me, please. I just need a minute. Just let me talk to you for one minute. Please." She was practically whining it into the phone, but she didn't care. She let the tears run down her face and she just hung up the phone. She wasn't going to be able to finish the message without a full breakdown. She just took a pill, putting herself to sleep and not waking up until the next afternoon.

Nat walked in as soon as she heard her stirring and sat down on her bed, "Hey, so… Adam came by the bar last night. He's worried about you." Shauna looked away from her. She really didn't care. 'He said that you have a short story due and that your professor needed you to send it in, regardless of what's going on.' Shauna sighed. She didn't care about that. She didn't care about any of it. Nat continued, "He said you already finished it." Shauna looked up at her. She knew she should just hand it over. It wouldn't hurt her any. It was already done.

"It's on my desk. Blue folder." Nat squeezed her arm and got up to grab it.

"You know you have to call him, right?"

"I just… don't want to. I really just don't." Nat sighed and nodded her head before shutting her door. The next day, it was graded and on her bed. Shauna read over it. She didn't think it was ready, but her professor seemed to love it. She sighed and crawled back under her covers, but she felt like a fucking disappointment. Her whole life was still out there, and she didn't care about fucking any of it. All she knew how to do anymore was sit in her fucking bed and cry. She was so sick of herself. She decided she couldn't stand it anymore and walked out to the living room to find Lottie.

"Hey, Shauna. What's up?"

"I think I'm kind of tired of being alone. Is that okay?" Lottie nodded and opened her arms for Shauna to fall into. They sat in silence for a while and Shauna looked up at her,

“Thank you. For everything. I’m so sorry that I ruined your friendship with Jackie. It’s so awful. I can’t believe I did that to you.” Lottie shook her head.

“She’ll call. It’s okay.” Shauna felt herself sinking back into herself. Lottie seemed to sense it too. “Why don’t you take a shower? We can go sit with Nat for a couple minutes? I’m sure she’d love to see you up and around.” Shauna considered it. Maybe it would make her feel better, and she knew she had to have stunk. She nodded and took herself to the bathroom, climbing into the shower and washing herself as quickly as she could before she started spiraling again and changed her mind. She walked out and put a pair of loose fitting jeans and a baggy shirt on. Lottie smiled at her and they walked in silence to Nat’s bar.

She practically jumped over the counter when she saw them. “Shauna! No way! You look great.”

Shauna smiled weakly. “Thanks, Nat.” She couldn’t think of much more to say, so they sat there quietly.

Lottie looked at Nat and spoke up, “Maybe a soda or something?” Nat nodded and poured her a diet coke. Shauna didn’t say much all night, but it felt good to be out of her bedroom. She just people watched for a while. There was a particularly rude customer that made the mistake of getting too drunk and bumping into Lottie. Instead of apologizing, he grunted at her to get the fuck out of his way. Lottie laughed but Nat was not amused. She grabbed him by his shirt and shoved him out the door and onto his ass. Shauna wasn’t sure whether to be amused or terrified. Nat was kinda scary when she was angry. She got home and immediately got on the phone. Jackie didn’t answer, of course. She wasn’t angry. She wasn’t frustrated. She was just missing her.

“Hey. I don’t— I don’t really know what to do here. I miss you. I miss talking to you everyday. I um… I submitted that short story I’ve been writing. I know you don’t care… I’m sorry, I just can’t handle not telling you. I can’t handle not calling to update you… I really can’t handle not knowing how you are. My professor really liked it. Said it felt authentic and raw. I’m pretty proud of it, I don’t know… Nat had to kick somebody out of the bar tonight It was terrifying, actually.” She felt stupid, honestly. She was talking into a void, and Jackie probably wasn’t even listening. She felt a wave of sadness rush through her. “Okay… Well, I guess I’m gonna go. I really wish you’d call. Bye.” Shauna changed into a pair of shorts and fell into her bed.

For whatever reason, she really thought Jackie would call her back with that one. Maybe it was ridiculous, but she just needed to hear her. She knew she fucked up. She knew she had actually, really hurt her this time, but she just wanted to talk about it. A few days later, she grabbed a bottle of rum from the kitchen and downed half of it before dialing the phone again. She was wasted, honestly. She was a fucking mess and all she wanted was for Jackie to answer the phone. She just wanted to know something about her. Fucking anything. It was 3 am and she could hear her own words starting to slur. She knew it was a bad idea, but she didn’t care. “Fuck baby, I miss you. I miss you more than I’ve ever felt anything before. I will do anything. I know I fucked this up. I fucked us up again. I let you down, and I know that. I think I really truly hate myself for it. Not just the recent stuff either…” Shauna broke down. She was in tears, ‘I hate everything I’ve ever done. I just… every day I wish I was a different person. I wish I just did what I should do, but I’m fucked up, Jackie. I just wish we could talk about it. Please. Please baby, just tell me what to do and I will do it.’ Every word

she spoke was in between sobs, and she didn't even have it in her to feel embarrassed about it. She took a couple breaths to stop herself from hyperventilating and then continued, "I'll break up with him. I'll tell him to never speak to me again. I'll fucking leave Brown and transfer to Rutgers. I need you in my life. I don't understand, baby. I am suffering, I am miserable, please. I'm so miserable that I think I've paid back whatever I owe you. Just talk to me. Even if it's the last time. Please just let me say sorry."

Shauna knew she wasn't going to answer anymore. She didn't really care, she just hoped she was at least listening. She had to be, right? She called the next night at the same time, "I'm so sorry. I didn't think that you'd be done with me like this. I didn't know that it would hurt you the way it did. I need you to answer the phone. I have so much I want to say to you… I have so much I need you to understand. I need you, Jackie. Please, answer your phone. I feel like I'm going crazy and I'm driving myself to complete and utter misery just for you to still not be here. Answer your phone, Jax. I know you can hear me. You have to at least be listening, right? You can't be done. We can't be done. Am I too late, Jax? Did you find somebody that doesn't hurt you like I do? Did you find somebody to make you happy? I won't be mad. I can't be mad. Just… please. I know you want nothing to do with me, and I know you said you don't want to be friends, but if there's somebody else that treats you better than I do, I can be your friend. I can do that. I'll do anything. I will do anything for you. Please. I love you so much, Jackie." She just cried into the phone. She should've hung up, but she didn't. She heard the line click, but it wasn't like the end of a call. Jackie had picked up. She gasped and went silent, waiting for her to say something.

"We can't be friends. I cannot be your friend, Shauna. We have never been anything as simple as friends, as much as you'd like to convince yourself and Adam otherwise."

Shauna inhaled quickly into the phone. "Jac—" she hung up before Shauna could say anything more. It stung, but she just heard her voice. She couldn't be angry. She couldn't be sad. She had heard her voice. Shauna spent the whole next day trying to get her to answer. She had to have called like 10 times and Jackie just let it ring. She gave up and was laying comatose in her bed when Adam walked into her bedroom.

"Shauna, hey. Why don't you let me take you out tonight?"

Shauna couldn't understand why, but she just got so angry. She yelled at him. She was fucking mean. "I'm not doing anything with you, Adam."

"What? Why? Did I do something wrong?"

"Fuck, Adam. Just leave me the fuck alone." She started to yell and he jumped back. 'I don't fucking want you. I don't want to go out with you. You have been nothing but fucking annoying for weeks. Would you *please* just take the fucking hint and leave me the fuck alone? I don't fucking care! Please.' Adam just stood there and stared at her. He looked like he wanted to say something, but just shook his head and stared. That just pissed Shauna off more. Why the fuck wasn't he gone? "Fucking leave, Adam. Whatever this has been… it's done. I'm done. I don't care about it. Just leave. Go home." Adam swallowed hard, eyes glued to the floor. Shauna instantly felt like shit. Why did she have to be so goddamn fucking mean? Adam turned and walked out, not saying another word. Shauna hit herself over and over again in the forehead, trying to figure out what the fuck her problem was. Nat

came in and grabbed her arm to stop herself, but Shauna fought her. She fucking deserved it. They both knew it.

"Hey, no stop. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. He was waiting outside. I didn't think it'd be that bad. Fuck." Nat managed to pin Shauna's arm down to the bed and she held Shauna tightly as she screamed. She couldn't do this. She couldn't fucking do this anymore. Eventually, her body forced itself to shut down and she passed out in her arms. When she woke up, she decided to call Jackie.

Of course, she didn't answer, but she was reinvigorated by the fact that Jackie had been listening. Her picking the phone up was enough to keep her going. "I… I broke up with him, Jax. I couldn't do it. I couldn't explain why I was so miserable, I couldn't say it in any way he could understand. I'm completely alone now. I know I did it to myself, but I need you. I know you don't want to be friends, or that you can't be friends with me. I know part of you hates me, but I also know there's a part of you that never could. Or at least… I hope so. Maybe I don't need a friend… maybe I just need you. Whatever form you can take in my life Jackie, I don't care. I still need you. Please." Shauna sat in silence, trying to figure out what to say that would make it different this time. Her head was spinning when she heard the line click again. Just like last time. Shauna gasped a little, "Jax? You there?"

They sat in silence, and Shauna needed so badly for her to just say something. Just react. "Please, baby," she whined. The phone call ended and Shauna was just left knowing that Jackie had picked up. She had wanted to talk to her. What was she supposed to do now? Jackie would call, right? She had to. Shauna spent the night sitting at her desk, just waiting. It took hours, but finally the call came in.

Shauna picked up and Jackie immediately asked, "You're done?"

Shauna answered as fast as she's ever answered anything in her life. "We're done, Jax."

"I'm coming over."

"Now–?" Shauna asked the question but Jackie hung up the phone before she could answer. It was like 9 pm on a Tuesday, but she didn't care. If Jackie was coming, then she had some work to do. She looked around her bedroom and realized the level of filth she had been living in. She grabbed the trash and dirty laundry and made it look presentable.

She vacuumed and wiped down the desk. She looked at her bed and thought about changing the sheets, but Jackie's scent was still on them. She couldn't do it. She just couldn't.

At 2 am, she got in the shower and actually cleaned herself for the first time in a long time. She shaved and washed her hair. She couldn't tell if she was starting to feel better because of that or just the sheer excitement of Jackie coming to see her. She knew that realistically it was probably just to tell her to stop calling or to end it officially, but she didn't care. She was just taking this one step at a time.

Chapter 46

Shauna sat on the kitchen counter just waiting for a knock at the door. When she heard it, she jumped up to answer. Jackie was on the other side. Her hair was perfectly messy and she was wearing a pair of sweats and a t-shirt. She was fucking beautiful. They stood at the door in silence until Shauna's eyes started to well up with tears. Jackie saw it and her face softened. She opened her arms and Shauna finally let out the breath she had been holding in.

"Just come here," she said with a sigh, wrapping Shauna in a hug in the doorway. As soon as she said it Shauna started to cry.

"I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, Jax." Jackie held her and led them into the living room. They sat down on the couch and Jackie ran her hands through the girl's hair. The touch was what really made her lose it. She had really thought that Jackie was just never going to speak to her again, and here she was comforting her. Shauna couldn't handle it. She was so happy that she was here, and still so sad that she let it get to this point. She took a deep breath and tried speaking. "I didn't think I'd ever see you again." She started hyperventilating and felt her face get hot. It was fucking embarrassing.

"I don't think I could've ever stayed away." She couldn't? Jackie smiled into the top of her head and kissed it. Shauna's crying slowed down and she looked up at Jackie. She looked so worried, and it broke her heart. "Do you want to go sit down and talk?" Shauna nodded and they walked together to the bedroom. Shauna sat down on her bed and Jackie sighed, sitting down across from her. Shauna sniffled and picked at her sweatpants, trying not to cry again.

"I'm sorry. I didn't think I'd be such a mess. I just— I really didn't think I was ever going to see you again."

Jackie shook her head, "No, don't apologize. I am a little bit worried though. I don't think I've ever seen you this worked up," Jackie sighed. 'I'm sorry that I wasn't here.' Shauna shook her head but she say anything yet. She didn't trust herself to stop a breakdown. Jackie continued, "What happened with Adam? Did he do something? Is that what's going on?" No, Adam didn't do anything. Shauna had fucking yelled at him and probably hurt him too. That's just what she does.

"No. I was the asshole, again." Shauna felt Jackie's eyes on her, but she couldn't look up. She knew she would completely break if she did. Jackie placed her hand on Shauna's thigh and drew her attention anyway. She found that Jackie's eyes actually managed to make her feel better. She didn't look at her with disappointment or hurt, just concern. She wanted to understand. Shauna continued, 'I've been… a bit of a mess since spring break, or the week after spring break, I guess. I actually haven't really left the apartment since then.' She looked back down at her lap, "I don't want to seem like I'm trying to make you feel guilty. I promise it's not your fault. It's mine and I know that."

"I won't take it that way. Just talk to me." Shauna nodded.

"When Lottie came back up from saying goodbye to you guys I asked him to leave, and then he'd call and I wouldn't answer. He came by and he kept asking what was wrong. He was honestly really sweet about it," Shauna rolled her eyes and sighed, 'It just became very clear how little he meant to me after that night.' She looked up at Jackie and grabbed her hand. "I never should have left with him that night. I never should have entertained it that night. I should have just been with you. All I have ever wanted was to be with you, and I let you down when you took a chance on me." Shauna took a deep breath, "All I have ever done is hurt you. Every time you choose to trust me I hurt you. I am just… so fucked up in the head."

Jackie shook her head. "Why did you? Leave that night, entertain him?"

"I thought you were going to regret it and tell me that we broke the rules and it was a one time thing. I thought I was going to ruin it with him and not have a real chance with you and end up completely alone while you have the time of your life with Charlie or whoever. Then it was clear that you were pissed off and I should have just fixed it but I got defensive. I always get so fucking defensive. I saw you with that girl and I just wanted to fucking kill her. I got so drunk so fast and then when I tried to kiss you, you pushed me away. I get why you did it. Believe me, I know I was being a dick. I just felt so rejected and I knew you didn't actually want me to leave with him, but I was just trying to hurt you. I lashed out and it was fucked up. I'm really sorry, Jackie." Jackie nodded and looked down. It looked like she wasn't really sure what to say.

"Charlie and I haven't been anything to each other in over a month. We don't talk anymore. I haven't really spoken to anyone but Re or Van since that morning. I've been kind of holed up in my room." Shauna felt like an asshole for being relieved. She didn't want to think about anybody touching her ever again.

"I really didn't expect you to be so hurt. I thought it was going to just be like any other fight, but then a week went by and you weren't answering or returning my calls, Lottie had tried to call and apparently you weren't there to answer. I spiraled. I really did. Adam could've dropped dead at the foot of my bed and I don't think I would've noticed. He came in yesterday trying to get me out of bed and I just yelled at him. I told him I didn't care about him and that all he was was a nuisance. I was really awful." Shauna shook her head, ashamed.

"Why didn't you tell him about me?" Shauna watched Jackie's eyes well up with tears and she choked on her words, "Was Jeff really more significant to you than I was?" A tear rolled down her cheek and Shauna looked up at her, horrified. Was that really what she thought? Shauna hurried to wipe it away.

"God, no. I'm so sorry I didn't realize you actually thought that." She was absolutely fucking appalled by the suggestion. Shauna thought for a second. Maybe she just needed to be completely honest. "This is going to make me sound horrible."

"I don't think you're horrible, Shauna. I'm just trying to understand."

"If we were dating and he knew about you… like everything about you, it would be fair for him to set boundaries. He'd be uncomfortable with sleepovers and maybe pay enough attention to realize how fucking bad I wanted you. I couldn't risk it. I probably shouldn't have been with him at all, he just… wanted me, I guess."

Jackie nodded and looked at her, “The problem was never how badly I wanted you.” Shauna exhaled. It was ridiculously nice to hear, actually. Everything she wasn’t able to figure out for herself pretty much revolved around that one question.

“I think I know that… but my head doesn’t think that way.”

Jackie held Shauna’s face in her hands. Her skin was soft and warm, and she almost lost herself in the girl’s touch. “I have spent my whole life wanting you, Shauna Shipman.” She could feel the waterworks coming again. She had waited *so* long to hear her say that. All her life, she just wanted to hear those words.

“Really?” she asked, and she felt so vulnerable. She wanted Jackie to confirm it. She wanted her to tell her she wasn’t just hearing things or imagining things.

“Since like second grade. Seriously.” Really? It had been mutual for *that* long? Shauna looked down at Jackie’s lips like she needed them, but she was terrified to be turned away again. Would it be a bad time to kiss her? Wasn’t that what Jackie said she wanted? Jackie leaned in and gave her what she wanted. She kissed her gently, and Shauna felt her warmth spread through her face and then her chest. It felt so nice that she started to get emotional again. Jackie pulled away and Shauna felt a tear run down her face.

Her voice broke when she finally tried to speak again, “I didn’t ruin it?”

“No, baby.” Jackie shook her head and smiled, “Just… No more boyfriends okay? Or girlfriends. Just me, yeah?” This felt like a fucking dream. It was everything she had ever wanted. All she had to do was break up with Adam? Seriously?

Shauna smiled at her and nodded her head. She leaned in and kissed her again, smiling through it. “Thank you for coming back, Jax.” Jackie nodded and they laid down together, Shauna’s head resting on Jackie’s chest. Jackie sighed and ran her fingers through the girl’s hair.

Jackie reached behind her and grabbed the shirt Shauna had been crying on for the past three weeks. “Does this mean I can have my shirt back?” Jackie asked, “Or do you need it still?” Shauna laughed and smacked her leg.

“Don’t make fun of me. I was depressed. You can have it back but I’ve cried into it for the past 3 weeks so…”

Jackie laughed back. “It’s yours. Probably looks better on you anyway.” They sat in silence for a while, neither of them wanting to waste any time asleep. Shauna thought back to that night. Was it all so easy now to just leave it behind? She remembered fucking Sam kissing Jackie’s neck and felt physically sick.

“I have class with that girl you went home with.” Jackie looked down at her but Shauna didn’t want to look up. She didn’t want to upset Jackie with her jealousy.

“Seriously? I’m so sorry, I didn’t know. I honestly have been calling her notShauna to Van and Re this whole time.” Shauna turned her head to look back at Jackie. Part of her was offended, and part of her was glad. NotShauna felt crazy, but at least Sam wasn’t memorable.

She sighed, “I’m never going back to class.”

"You have to go to class, Shipman come on. You were smart enough to get into Brown and ditch me for the ivies, you can't throw it away now." Shauna's jaw dropped at the directness of it. "If it helps at all the sex was fucking awful." Jackie said it so bluntly, but with a wide grin on her face.

Shauna laughed in shock, "Wow, Jax. You've got jokes today, huh?"

Jackie shrugged and smiled at her. She dropped her smile a bit and replaced the look with something more flirty, "Did he make you cum?"

Shauna raised her eyebrows. "That's none of your business…" Shauna looked away, "But no. He did not."

Jackie smiled, "You must not have prayed hard enough, huh?" She rolled her eyes and smacked Jackie playfully in the stomach.

"Oh you thought you were so funny with that one didn't you?"

"Admit it, a very very small part of you wanted to laugh."

Shauna tried to save face, but she cracked after a few seconds and laughed, "No comment." It had been a little funny. She could admit that now that Jackie was back in her arms.

Jackie looked her up and down and grinned at her. "So…," Jackie couldn't even deliver the rest of the line. Shauna knew what she was going to say. Probably something about wanting a shot at it. Jackie didn't need to ask. Shauna was on her in under a second, kissing her and pushing her down into the mattress. Jackie laughed into her mouth, "Guessing that's a yes?"

Shauna laughed, "Oh shut up." She kissed her again and Jackie's hands tore at her shirt, pulling it up over her head and throwing it onto the floor. Jackie immediately buried herself in Shauna's tits, licking and sucking and biting at her skin. Her hands were moving up Shauna's sides, scratching her lightly, teasingly. Shauna moaned and pushed her knee in between Jackie's legs, needing to make her feel good too. Jackie pulled at her sweats, trying to get them off, but Shauna didn't want her to stop moaning. She didn't want her to stop breathing so heavily. Jackie looked up at her and the second they made eye contact she moaned. Shauna grinned at her and bit at her pulse point, licking up the length of her jaw and moaning into her ear. Jackie looked back down at Shauna's tits and her eyes rolled back. She ground her knee harder into her clit and Jackie just became entranced. Her eyes searched Shauna's body and the noises that were coming out of her mouth were fucking *insane* .

"Do you like what you see, baby?" Jackie's eyes rolled back in her head and she came in her jeans. Shauna smiled, "I'm gonna take that as a yes."

Jackie tackled her and ripped her sweatpants off of her. She dove into Shauna's pussy face first and moaned at the taste of her. Shauna let her head fall back into the bed and just felt Jackie's tongue dip inside her. She felt it work back and forth along her slit and then settle on her clit, sucking and licking at it in circles. Shauna reached down and grabbed her hair, pulling it out of her face so that she could watch. Jackie felt so fucking good that Shauna was on the edge of an orgasm in seconds. She pulled hard at Jackie's hair as all her muscles tensed to prepare for it. She was so, so close. She took a breath in, ready to just let it all

release, just for Jackie to pull away entirely and sit straight up. Shauna shot up to look at her, confused why she was stopping. Was something wrong? "What? What?" she asked, begging Jackie for some kind of explanation as to why she wasn't fucking her anymore.

"Is that what it was like… with *Adam?*" Jackie grinned as she said it and Shauna rolled her eyes, grinning back before grabbing Jackie by the hair and pushing her back down. Jackie moaned at the force of it and Shauna felt her tongue explore every inch of her. She returned with a new intensity. She wanted Shauna to cum now. She pressed two fingers into Shauna's pussy and started to fuck her slow and deep, something that Shauna was very unprepared for, but something that felt SO good. She screamed and Jackie slapped her hand over the girl's mouth as she rode out her orgasm. She ground her hips hard into Jackie's face and Jackie gently licked and sucked her through it. Before Shauna had even regained her breath, she dragged Jackie up to her by her hair and bit down on her bottom lip. She wanted more of her. She wanted to kiss her, to be close to her. She looked and felt good between Shauna's legs, but she was just so far away. Jackie attacked her with the same intensity as Shauna's hands pulled hard at Jackie's shorts. She needed them off. She needed everything off right now.

Shauna pushed her fingers hard and fast into Jackie. She pumped in and out like she was on a mission, lips glued to Jackie's neck. Jackie moaned and her head shot off the bed. She grabbed Shauna's back and held her close. "I miss the way those scratches looked on your back… so sexy, baby." Shauna moaned and fucked her harder, feeling Jackie's hands clamped down on her. She wanted her to dig in, to make her bleed. She wanted to be able to see it in the morning.

"Leave them again, then." Jackie bit down hard on Shauna's shoulder to keep herself quiet and as she came she tore down Shauna's back with both hands. Shauna moaned with her, loving the feeling of Jackie's nails deep in her skin. Jackie sat up, pushing Shauna gently back into the bed. Shauna didn't know what she was doing at first, but when she straddled Shauna's stomach, slowly making her way up to her face she understood. She wanted it so badly. She wanted Jackie to use her to get off. She wanted to feel her pussy on her face and her thighs on either side of her head. Jackie was making her way up at a painful fucking pace, and she couldn't handle it. She cupped Jackie's ass with either hand and practically threw her up to meet her face. Shauna wrapped her arms around Jackie's thighs, the pads of her fingers sinking into her, never letting her get away. She pushed her tongue inside her and moaned at the taste of her. She used her hands on Jackie's ass to push her forward and backward on her tongue and Jackie's moans only egged her on. Jackie started to buck her hips with the rhythm that Shauna had set and she gripped hard at the headboard. Shauna could hear the way it was banging on the wall, and she knew that her neighbors probably wouldn't be thrilled, but she didn't care. She just wanted Jackie to cum. She wanted to feel it all over her tongue, all over her face. She wanted to be the one to cause it. Not fucking Charlie or whoever the fuck had been doing it at the bar. Her. She wanted Jackie to know that only she could make her feel this good.

"Fuck, Shauna. Touch yourself. Please. I want to cum with you." Shauna moaned and she felt Jackie's thighs squeeze at her head. She moved her hand down to her clit, pushing her fingers around it in circles. She moaned a little and pushed them inside. The taste of Jackie's pussy and the feeling of her body on top of her was enough to have her heavy breathing and on the edge embarrassingly quickly. Jackie rocked her hips, pushing herself

back and forth on Shauna's tongue and she felt like she was going to lose it. She grabbed Jackie's ass with one arm now, forcing her down harder on her tongue. She wanted her to cum. She wasn't going to be able to hold out much longer if she didn't. She sucked on her clit and Jackie's legs started to shake. She gasped and the sound of it sent Shauna over the edge herself. Shauna moaned into her pussy and just allowed herself to ride it out. Jackie's legs twitched one last time before she climbed off of her and laid down beside her. Shauna couldn't control the way she was smiling. She hadn't felt this happy in WEEKS and she couldn't contain it.

"I fucking love it when you do that," Shauna said.

Jackie looked at her and smiled. "Turn around, I want to see your back," Jackie demanded. Shauna grinned and turned over on her stomach. Jackie exhaled and touched her lower back, applying pressure on Shauna's skin.

"Fuck, baby you look so good." Shauna moaned softly, loving the way her voice sounded. She sounded just lost in the look of Shauna's body. It was fucking sexy. Jackie's hands moved lightly over scratch marks she had left, and it stung but Shauna loved it. She inhaled and held her breath, letting Jackie touch her wherever she wanted. "Flex."

"What?" Shauna turned her head to try to figure out what Jackie was asking of her.

"Your back. Please?" Shauna laughed and shook her head, turning back over and pressing her shoulder blades together. She could hear Jackie's little moan on top of her when she did it and it made her wet all over again. She liked being looked at like this. She pulled her arms apart slightly and felt the stretch in her muscles. "*Fuck,*" Jackie said breathlessly. Shauna chuckled. Now she was being dramatic. She hadn't worked out in literally forever, she had probably lost all of her muscle.

"I haven't been to the gym in weeks. You're losing it."

"You look fucking beautiful Shauna Shipman," Shauna smiled softly. It was like the words meant more coming from Jackie, like if Jackie said it then it must have been true. She tucked her hands underneath Shauna's body, grabbing her tits and kissed down the marks she had left. "I really fucking missed you," Jackie said softly against her skin.

"You have no fucking idea," Shauna responded. Jackie smiled and toppled over next to her. She ran her fingers over Shauna's damaged skin until they both eventually fell asleep.

Chapter 47

The next morning, Shauna woke up to the sound of her bedroom door creaking open.

Nat peeked through the opening, “Shauna. Wake up I brought fo— Oh fuck, Jackie?!” She slammed the door shut and Jackie laughed, making sure she was covered enough for what was coming next. She looked over at Shauna and smiled awkwardly.

“Here we go,” Shauna said with a chuckle. Lottie had to have been pretty close behind her. Shauna heard her laugh and her suspicions were confirmed. Lottie swung the door wide open and charged in with a wide smile.

“Jackie! I didn’t know you were coming!” Lottie ran and jumped into Shauna’s bed, apparently unconcerned by their very obvious nudity. Shauna shook her head and pulled the covers up a little higher.

“Glad we didn’t wake you,” Shauna joked. Lottie gasped and started to giggle. Jackie smacked her shoulder, unamused.

Jackie responded to her, ignoring Shauna’s comment. “Neither did I, really. I got in at like 3 this morning.”

Shauna could hear Nat laughing in the hallway and Lottie rolled her eyes, “Natty, baby don’t be a wuss. They’re covered,” Lot yelled out to her. Nat sighed as she made her way back in, refusing to look up at them aside from the shocked expression she sent Shauna. Lottie continued, ‘So… this?’ She pointed between the two of them and wiggled her eyebrows. “Are we back?”

Jackie smiled at her and Shauna just felt warm. Jackie was excited. She was happy to be with her, and she was openly choosing her and wanting her. “We are very back.”

Lottie squealed and clapped her hands and Nat laughed. “Okay, okay. Congratulations or whatever but you guys need to put some goddamn clothes on please.” Jackie laughed and Shauna nodded. Nat grabbed Lottie by the arm and pulled her out of bed, shutting the door behind her as she walked out.

“Sorry about that,” Shauna said. “They stopped knocking like a week ago.”

Jackie laughed and shook her head. “It’s okay. I’m just glad I’m here. I’m glad I came.”

“Me too.” Jackie leaned in and kissed her, letting the blanket fall as she did. Shauna grabbed at her stomach and Jackie gasped into her mouth.

“Okay, no. You cannot touch me like that if you want to get out of bed today.”

Shauna grinned at her, “Who said I wanted to get out of bed today?” She kissed Jackie’s neck and wrapped her hands around her thighs. Jackie moaned quietly and pushed Shauna back with a hand on her chest.

“They are right outside, and I think they brought breakfast. They’re probably waiting!”

Shauna whispered in her ear, “Let them wait, then.” Jackie gasped and it looked like Shauna was gonna win for a minute before she jumped out of bed.

“Nope. No. Later.” Shauna grinned at her and Jackie’s face turned red.

“Fine, fine,” Shauna agreed. ‘Definitely later. 100% later.’ Jackie rummaged through her clothes and threw on a big shirt and a pair of old soccer shorts. Shauna decided it was probably time she did the same. She was getting dressed when she heard Jackie scoff. She turned to see her with the picture of Adam. “Oh, shit. I just didn’t think to get rid of it.”

Jackie smiled at her, “You alright if I pitch it?” Shauna nodded and Jackie took the frame apart, taking the picture out and throwing it in her trash. She grabbed a picture of her and Shauna off of Shauna’s wall and replaced it, setting it back down on the nightstand.

“I didn’t know I had a chance, you know. If you would’ve asked I would’ve broken things off months ago. I just didn’t know you wanted that.”

Jackie sighed, sitting down on Shauna’s bed. “I didn’t really know either. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but I very rarely am capable of communicating what I want.” Shauna laughed and sat down next to her.

“I just need you to know it was always you. It was always going to be you.” Shauna felt her eyes well up with tears and Jackie smiled softly at her.

“I’m sorry I was so mean.” Shauna shook her head. Jackie didn’t need to apologize for anything, but Jackie held her head still with a hand on either cheek. “No, listen. I just didn’t understand. I thought we were gonna be together. I thought that night was it for us and that you were just gonna dump him and be with me. I was an idiot for not saying it.” Shauna didn’t like her calling herself an idiot. She wasn’t an idiot. If anything Shauna was the idiot.

“No, no, no. I’m the idiot. I should’ve just danced with you. I should’ve told him to go home.”

Jackie shook her head, “You didn’t know, baby. I didn’t tell you. Actually the only thing I had been telling you was to give him a chance. I should’ve just talked to you.” Shauna sighed, knowing that she wanted to take some of the blame. She was probably right about at least some of it anyway. They were awful at communicating.

“I’m not gonna hurt you, Jackie. I don’t want anyone but you. I promise. I am entirely yours.” Jackie smiled at her and kissed her. They held each other for a second before Jackie’s voice broke the silence.

“So am I allowed to ask where that other girl ranks now?” Shauna laughed.

“Way, way, way lower than you.”

Jackie laughed. “She better.”

Shauna felt safe and comfortable and secure. It felt like after this, nothing was ever going to be able to tear them apart. She had her best friend and the love of her life back, and she didn’t want any more white lies to possibly come between them. It would be embarrassing, but she had to confess. “Can I tell you something a little embarrassing?”

Jackie pulled away to look at her, “Yes of course.”

"You know how I told you I didn't remember her name?"

Jackie's face fell, "Yes…"

"Well, the truth is I was just a little embarrassed to tell you her name was Taylor Jackson." Jackie's hand covered her mouth and she started to laugh. Shauna smiled and shook her head. She knew she was gonna give her so much shit for it.

"Honestly, it's a little reassuring."

Shauna laughed, "Really?"

"As long as she's lower than me on your rankings… yeah." Shauna laughed and shook her head.

"Can I ask you something?" Shauna said. Jackie nodded. "What happened with Charlie? Why didn't you tell me?"

Jackie sighed, "She got back with her ex. I'm happy for her, honestly. I just wanted you to think I was doing as well as you were. You'd tell me about your dates and he'd be over when I called. I didn't want you to see how miserable I was."

Shauna sighed, "If you had told me it upset you so much I would've ended it, though. It wouldn't have even been a debate for me."

Jackie smiled, "I know. I just… it felt unfair to ask of you. I didn't know what I wanted. Or— I knew what I wanted, but I was stopping myself from just letting it happen. I'm sorry that I lied. I'm sorry that I wouldn't just let you love me."

Shauna laughed, "It's a good thing you actually have no control over that." Shauna grabbed her chin and pulled her in closer. "I love you, Jackie Taylor. Always have, always will." Jackie blushed and kissed her.

"I love you too, Shauna Shipman. Always." Shauna leaned in to kiss her again and they both jumped at the sound of Nat knocking on the door.

"Stop fucking, we have breakfast." Shauna laughed and opened the door.

"Not fucking. Just talking."

"Thank god. Y'all should do that more often." Shauna rolled her eyes and Jackie jumped off the bed and followed them out.

"We're working on it," Jackie said with a laugh. Shauna saw a grin creep onto Nat's face and she could tell that she was happy for them. It was sweet, honestly.

"You both need to wash your hands," Nat said. "Nasty." They laughed and did as they were told before joining her and Lottie in the kitchen.

They ate breakfast and Shauna spent the rest of the day showing Jackie around campus. She figured one more sick day wouldn't hurt her too badly. They walked to the library, and then to the private literature department library. Shauna bought Jackie a coffee and some lunch too. They spent the day damn near giddy. Shauna couldn't let go of her hand, craving the touch that she felt like she spent her whole life missing out on. They spent another night together before Jackie had to go back to work and classes. Shauna cried when she left. It felt

like she just got her back and here she was, leaving her again. Jackie wiped her tears and kissed her, promising to see her again soon.

It took a week for Shauna to make the trip to Rutgers. She couldn't stay away from her even if she tried. When she walked in, Renee jumped into her arms. Jackie let go of her hand and just laughed, watching it happen. "Y'all took way longer than I thought, but I'm so happy for you guys, seriously." Shauna laughed and thanked her. It wasn't until then that she really understood what their relationship was. She was genuinely excited for them. They went out to the bar and Renee bought their drinks, then they went home and Shauna spent all night showing Jackie *just* how much she loved her. The next morning, Shauna remembered her voicemail. She gasped when it popped into her head and rushed over to Jackie's phone.

"Oh, god. What are you doing?" Jackie asked.

"You told me I could listen to it. All I had to do was make the trip. I made the trip. I'm listening to it." She waited for Jackie's permission before pressing play. "Come on, this has been killing me for fucking months now!"

"Fine, fine. Do what you gotta do." Shauna wasted no time hitting the button and sitting back to listen to it.

Her voice kind of scared her. She was *so* drunk, slurring her words and losing focus. Jesus. "Jackie, baby. I'm so sorry. I'm so so so sorry for everything. I can't believe I fucking yelled at you."

"Yeah, me either," Jackie said from behind her. Shauna shushed her, not wanting to miss anything. She had waited so long for this, she was gonna hear every word. Jackie just laughed and sat down on the bed.

"I feel like I just keep hurting you. I know you're going on dates… Now I'm going on dates. Don't you hate this? I think I hate this." Shauna heard herself start to laugh and she cringed. 'God I'm so stupid for this. I probably shouldn't be calling, I know that. I just miss you so fucking much. Adam just… he's not you.' Shauna flinched a little at the mention of his name. At least it was kind of hyping Jackie up? She looked over at Jackie who smiled at her smugly before the sound of her voice brought her back, "You have no idea, baby… Just the thought of you even looking at somebody new… God Jackie it kills me… I keep this picture of you by my bed…" Shauna smiled. She was so fucking whipped. This whole time she was so down bad for her. "You look so sexy." Shauna laughed at herself, covering her face. Oh god. "I wish you were here right now… but I guess you probably wish you weren't. We wouldn't be just friends if I had you in my bedroom." Jesus, she was very… honest. Jackie had put it well. "Do you know how hard I've tried to keep myself from saying anything bad? All I want to do is say bad things to you, baby." Shauna heard Jackie sigh and looked back at her.

She laughed and Jackie shrugged, "You can say bad things to me whenever you'd like, my love." Shauna rolled her eyes and turned back to her own voice.

"Adam is just… I don't think I like it as much with him." Oh, god. Not *another* mention of Adam. Jesus Christ. She heard herself start to sob and rubbed her face. What a mess. This was more embarrassing than she thought it would be. She continued, "I love you, Jax. I miss you. I'm sorry I ruined us." That's when Nat came in, sounding irritated as fuck.

"Shipman. You need to be in bed, babe."

Shauna continued, "No, no. I'm talking to Jackie!"

"Jackie?" Nat asked. "Shauna, she's not here. I'm hanging up the phone. Go to bed." The phone hung up and Shauna looked up at Jackie before immediately pressing the delete button. Jackie gasped and jumped up.

"No way you just deleted that!"

Shauna laughed, "I'll leave you a better one later. We don't need that anymore." Jackie jumped on her back playfully like she didn't weigh less than half of Shauna's back squat. Shauna picked her up and spun her around before slamming her on the bed.

Jackie reached up trying to pull Shauna down, "I can't believe you deleted my voicemail!" Shauna pinned her hands to the bed and the vibe of their conversation changed *quickly* . Jackie's breathing quickened and she looked Shauna up and down. "Hey, so… what were you saying about all those bad things?"

Shauna grinned, feeling herself getting wetter by the second. Jackie just looked so fucking good underneath her. "You have no idea how wet I get just looking at you, Jackie." Jackie gasped and tried to resist the hold Shauna had on her arms. Shauna put more pressure into her wrists and leaned down, kissing teasingly down her neck. 'You look so pretty when you're underneath me.' Jackie's breath hitched and Shauna finally gave her what she wanted, leaning down and kissing her. She pulled away and Jackie craned her neck, trying not to let her get away. Shauna smiled at her. "Tell me what you want."

Jackie answered breathlessly, "I want to touch you. I want to feel you and taste you." She squirmed underneath Shauna's hold and Shauna leaned down, kissing her again. Jackie moaned and Shauna smiled. She figured she had teased her enough. She released her wrists and Jackie took her by surprise, tackling her and turning them over. She sat on top of her and kissed Shauna, biting her lips and then her neck. She sucked hard on the skin and Shauna moaned, grabbing her hips and pulling her shirt up over her head. Jackie's tits just sat so fucking perfectly. Shauna leaned up and took them in her mouth, listening to Jackie moan in her ear. She got louder as Jackie worked up to her ear, hands raking through her hair.

She pushed Shauna back down on the bed and pulled her shorts off before running her fingers through her wetness. "Oh my god, Shauna. You're fucking soaked."

Shauna moaned, "I told you I would be." Shauna grinned and Jackie wiped it completely off her face by pushing her fingers deep inside her. Shauna grunted at the force of it and Jackie latched onto her nipples, licking and sucking at them like she missed them. Shauna grabbed the back of her neck and held her down. Jackie curled her fingers up inside of her and Shauna moaned a little too loud before her whole body just started to shake and release. Jackie moved to her cleavage, sucking down the sides of her tits and leaving marks all the way down. She started to move down to eat her out, but Shauna just wanted to kiss her. She just wanted her tongue in her mouth. 'Kiss me. Please.' Jackie grinned and pushed her tongue inside her mouth. Shauna's eyes rolled back and she came, moaning into her. Shauna flipped them over and pulled her pants off before leaning down and kissing her opening gently. Jackie shivered and Shauna pulled her in closer by grabbing her thighs and yanking. Jackie squealed and Shauna dipped her tongue inside, lapping at her wetness. She loved

turning Jackie on. She loved seeing her come undone. She was so fucking hot. Shauna sucked on her clit, running her tongue over the spot. Jackie moaned and wrapped her hands up in Shauna's hair. She was about to come undone, so Shauna pushed her fingers inside, flexing them and feeling Jackie's pussy clench around them. She came so hard her ass lifted off the bed, and Shauna made sure it didn't end there. She sucked harder and pushed her fingers deeper, pushing from one orgasm into another. Jackie gasped and tried to catch her breath, pulling Shauna back up by her hair. They laid there for a second before Jackie shot up. "Oh fuck, Shipman. We're late. Re's waiting for us at the diner." Jackie shot up and grabbed their clothes, pulling Shauna up too and forcing her to get ready.

It was a perfect weekend, and one she was nowhere ready to leave. But she did have classes to get back to. She had taken more than enough time off. She got back into her routine, working out and journaling. Now she had really seen what happened when she neglected it, and Nat and Lottie would agree that it wasn't pretty. Shauna spent the next two months apologizing to them profusely and thanking them for not dropping her off at a mental hospital. They insisted that they were just being friends, but it didn't really ease Shauna's guilt. They decided to drop it as long as Shauna promised to never skip a workout ever again. She agreed to their terms with a laugh, and finished out the semester strong.

When she got home, she immediately sat her mom down. She knew she had to tell her, and even though she was 99% sure Deb would be supportive, she was still nervous.

"I have something to tell you, and I wanna say in advance that I love you very much and I'm really sorry if I'm about to stress you out at all." A wave of concern washed over her mom's face, and she took a deep breath.

"What's going on, honey? Did something happen?"

"Well… something has kind of been happening. I'm gay, mom. I think that I like men and women." Deb took a deep breath, but didn't really react.

"Okay."

It looked like she was ready for the real 'something' and Shauna was taken aback. What exactly did she mean by 'okay'. "Is that… are you okay?"

"Was that the thing?" Deb asked, exhaling a sigh of relief.

"It was like… half the thing, I guess." Deb laughed.

"Oh, honey. That's not a thing. I understand it's big for you, but for me it means pretty much nothing. I'm so sorry you thought that I would be upset." Shauna was kind of reeling. She expected it to go well, but maybe not this well.

"Okay… that's okay. Um, Jackie and I are actually kind of together." Deb's eyes lit up and she jumped to pull Shauna into a hug.

"Oh my god. Really?" Shauna smiled and hugged her back as soon as she got over the shock of her reaction.

"Yeah. Really. You're not even a little bit upset?"

"Of course not! She's always been family to me, now she's just got a real title. Oh my, I am so happy for you guys." Deb pulled away and held Shauna at an arm's length, just

beaming at her. “If I’m being honest, I think I always kind of knew.”

Shauna laughed, “What? What do you mean?”

Deb looked away for a second with a little smile, “I mean… you guys had a big blow out fight because you were going to different colleges? I don’t know. It felt like more of a break up than a falling out. I just didn’t want to send you into a spiral if you weren’t ready yet.”

Shauna shook her head, shocked. She should’ve given her mom more credit apparently. Deb insisted on taking the girls out to dinner to celebrate, and Jackie moved into their house from that point on. They spent the rest of college doing long distance, and it was fucking hard, but so so worth it. Once they graduated, they moved to New York City. Shauna started writing a book and Jackie got an amazing opportunity with a big marketing company that does a lot of work in Times Square. It paid well enough for them to get their own apartment, and it coincidentally brought them closer to Tai and Van. Lottie and Nat moved up there six months later when Lot got an opportunity to develop a program for young teens with mental health issues. She worked to fund and provide therapy and healthy alternative outlets for kids that don’t have access to the resources they need. Nat spent some time bartending at a popular lesbian bar before taking it over, buying it and making it entirely her own.

Their group became something stronger than family. They spent every holiday, birthday and milestone together, celebrating every promotion and every win. Shauna was happy. She was more than happy. She was safe and secure and content. She was Jackie’s, and Jackie was hers. It was all she had ever wanted her life to be. It was perfect.